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A Soldier's Children

John Strange Winter, Mrs Henrietta Eliza Vaughan (Palmer) Stannard

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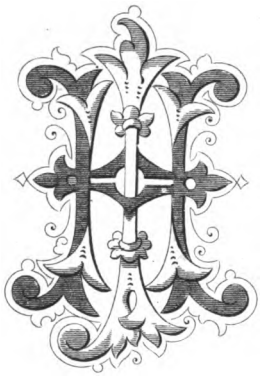

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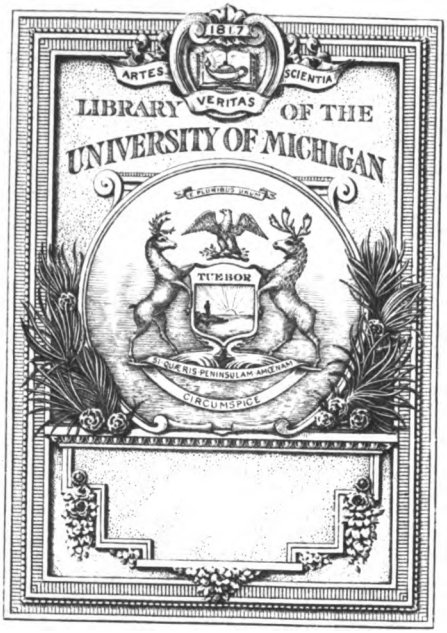

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A SOLDIER'S CHILDREN

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A SOLDIER'S CHILDREN

BY

JOHN STRANGE WINTER

AUTHOR OF

'CAVALRY LIFE,' 'REGIMENTAL LEGENDS,' 'BOOTLES' BABY,' ETC.

WITH 34 ILLUSTRATIONS BY E. G. THOMSON AND EVELYN STUART HARDY

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1892

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Stannard, Mrs Henrietta Eliza Vaughan (Palmer)

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Dedication

TO

MY THREE DEAR CHILDREN

BEAUFIE, BOOTLES, AND BETTY

I WITH MUCH LOVE DEDICATE THIS STORY

WHICH WILL IN AFTER YEARS

SOMEWHAT REMIND THEM OF THEIR OWN CHILDHOOD

JOHN STRANGE WINTER

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A SOLDIER'S CHILDREN

CHAPTER I

NELL AND I

MRS. WINTER and I have been married over ten years and never a chick or child have we had. At first Nell worried about it a good deal. She is dotingly fond of children and would have made the best of mothers, as she does the best of wives. However, as year after year crept by, and Providence did not think fit to send us any, she became more reconciled to the inevitable, and only now and then referred to the one great want in our lives.

'You know, Jack,' she said one day—well, about five years ago now—'I do think it hard that Nannie should go and have twins—I do really! Here are we with this big house, this big garden, and nothing more than a couple of dogs and a cat to waste our care on, and there is Nannie, poor girl, dragging about at the tail of a regiment, and hard set to make both ends meet. We haven't got a child at all, and Nannie, who was *quite* content with dear little Phyllis, goes and

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has twins. Really I do think Providence arranges very badly in a great many cases.'

I bethought me of the Californian Patent-Steam-Laundry-Queen, who petitioned the municipal authorities in Paris to hire the Arc de Triomphe as a means of lighting up an evening garden party.

'Won't let me hang my electric lights on it!' she said, when the refusal was handed to her. 'Oh!—what's the old thing worth? I'll buy it.'

'Supposing you were to buy the twins of Nannie,' I suggested. 'She can't have got used to them, or particularly fond of them yet—I dare say she'll be only too glad.'

My wife looked at me with the deepest reproach. 'Why, Jack,' she exclaimed, 'Nannie simply worships her children.'

'How do you know?' I asked. 'She worships Phyl, I'll allow, but you haven't seen the new ones.'

'*Nothing* would induce Nannie to part with them,' she declared positively.

I don't know if Nell made any advances on the subject to her sister—I fancy not; but the twins flourished and throve apace, and when they were just beginning to toddle, Nannie's husband, who was in the 200th Regiment of the Line, was ordered to Ireland, and for three years we saw very little of the youngsters. We saw Nannie of course, for each year she came over and paid us a long visit, and twice Captain Dare came

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too. But the children always stayed at home with their nurse, who by all accounts was the most wonderful treasure that ever drew breath.

'REALLY I DO THINK PROVIDENCE ARRANGES VERY BADLY IN A GREAT MANY CASES'

Well, about three months ago the 200th were ordered to Portsmouth, and Nell looked forward to seeing a great deal more of the Dares than had been

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practicable during their sojourn in the Emerald Isle. Of course Nell went down to see them as soon as they had got a bit settled, and she brought Mrs. Dare back with her, and we spent a very pleasant week taking her round. And then one evening, about a week ago, we were just beginning dinner when Mrs. Dare turned up unexpectedly, bringing very bad news.

'Mrs. Dare has come, ma'am,' said Potter coming in with a dignified and injured air, as if neither Mrs. Dare nor any other visitor had any business to arrive in the middle of a meal.

My wife jumped up and ran to the door, just as my sister-in-law entered. 'Why, Nannie,' she exclaimed, 'this is a surprise—and a pleasure too, darling.'

Mrs. Dare literally flung herself into my wife's arms. 'Oh! Nelly—Nelly'—she wailed—'I'm in such trouble—I'm in such trouble.'

I gave up all idea of my dinner from that moment, for when any of my wife's people call her 'Nelly,' I know that something very dreadful has happened or is going to happen. 'My dear girl,' I said, 'I hope Bob is all right?'

'And the children?' Nell chimed in.

'Oh, yes, yes, in that way. But we've got orders for India and only six days' notice.'

My wife fairly staggered back. 'Nannie, darling,' she cried; then put her arms around her again, and

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hugged her as if all the authorities in the War Office should not tear her sister away; 'and so you'll have to go?'

'Oh, yes, yes. Bob cannot possibly get out of it. There's not a chance of the depôt even. And he says we can't take the children, and if we could it would be wicked to do it, for we should lose them to a certainty.'

'Oh, my poor darling!' cried Nell, with the tears already running down her face.

Mrs. Dare drew herself hopelessly away and dried her eyes. 'I—I am nearly mad, Nelly,' she said, in a trembling voice; 'they have never been away from me—they're so little to go to school, and—and——.' And then she broke down again and sobbed as if her poor heart would break.

My wife cast one piteous glance of supplication at me; an outsider might have believed from seeing it that I was the hardest-hearted brute in the world. I understood it, however, and touched my sister-in-law gently on the shoulder. 'My dear girl,' I said, 'there is no reason why the children should go to school at all—they are much too little. You pack up their traps, and send them on here with that wonderful old nurse you have told us so much about, and we'll look after them as well as our limited experience will allow.'

She sobbed more than ever for a minute or two,

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'I—I AM NEARLY MAD, NELLY'

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and then she made a great effort to get calm again. 'Oh, Jack dear,' she cried, 'you've taken such a load off my heart; you don't know, you never could know, unless you had children of your own and had to part with them like this. Oh, bless you, Jack! And you too, darling Nell. God bless you both, as I do with all my heart,' and then, poor little soul, she got up and kissed us both, and cried a little with her head on Nell's shoulder.

'It strikes me, Nannie, my dear,' I remarked when she had become quiet again, 'that a bit of dinner is about the best thing for you just now.' No, I was *not* thinking of my own dinner in the least. I was thinking wholly and solely of her. 'Potter, take the soup away and give Mrs. Dare a glass of Burgundy at once.'

Potter received my instructions with one sniff and took away the soup with another.

'Potter doesn't like my coming in like this,' said my sister-in-law, looking half inclined to cry again.

'Well, we haven't taken to letting lodgings yet, and when we do we shall not let them to Potter,' returned Nell drily. 'Come to the table, dear, and let me—— Where is Bob?'

'He has rushed off to order the uniforms and other things,' Mrs. Dare answered. 'Yes, Snippe will be there; Bob wired to him before we started from

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home. He will get some dinner at the Club, and come on here. Can you put us up, Nell? We can go to an hotel if you can't do with us.'

She was getting better already, poor little woman, and my Nell put out her hand and took hers tenderly. 'Why, Nannie darling,' she cried, 'this dreadful news has unnerved you altogether. Could you ever come to us, do you think, that we "couldn't do" with you —unless we had a fever in the house?'

So it was settled that the three children were to come to the Cedars as soon as their parents had left; that we would take care of them until further orders, and also that we should go down to Portsmouth and make all necessary arrangements for giving up the house in which they were living.

'I don't really think they'll be *much* trouble to you,' Nannie Dare said wistfully an hour or two later, when Bob Dare had turned up and had nearly wrung my hand off on hearing our views and plans for the future—'they really are *good* children, though I say it who shouldn't. The only thing I'm at all afraid of is that they may disturb you when you're writing.'

'Oh! Jack isn't touchy about a little noise,' cried Nell; 'are you, Jack?'

'Not a bit,' said I, 'and this house is big enough to get out of the way if they are rather racketty.'

So we chatted away for an hour or so longer until Nell carried her sister off to bed, when Nannie paid

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me one of the prettiest compliments it has ever been my lot to receive.

'Good-night, dear old Jack,' she said, putting her hands on my shoulders, and looking up at me with smiling lips and a suspicion of tears about her eyes. 'I'm so glad we called our boy after you, though Bob's people did say Robert John was the most horrible combination we could possibly have chosen;' and then she went off, and I had to sit down and hear it all over again from old Bob—how they had got the news, how Nannie had burst out crying, and how Bob had offered to go out by himself, if she liked to let him, and was afraid to leave the children. Then how good we were, how good Nell was, and how good I was, and what a load we had taken off their minds, and how it would come home to us; and then he got hold of my hand, and gripped it hard, till I began to think—though I am anything but a flabby person—that I should have to go down to Portsmouth with my fingers in splints.

It is wonderful what a good night's rest will do for anyone. In the morning Mr. and Mrs. Dare came down in quite a cheerful frame of mind—what, if I were speaking to a man and not to the blessed public, I should call 'chirpy.' They laid out their plans for the day very carefully, and were able to look at the advantages of the situation—always a good sign that!

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'After all, we shall be able to save a lot of money,' cried Nannie, 'and, of course, we shall want every farthing we can scrape together, by and by, when we have to think of governesses and schools. And now we haven't settled about the allowance for the present, dear Nell.'

'A hundred a year—ample,' answered Nell; and to that she held resolutely, saying that it would cover the nurse's wages and their clothes, and if it did not, Nannie need not worry herself about it.

'It isn't enough,' urged Nannie.

'I'll let you know if I find it too much for me,' Nell promised, and upon that understanding we agreed that the arrangement should stand.

Three days later we all went down to Portsmouth, when I was introduced to my nieces and my nephew with all form and ceremony.

'You are our Uncle Jack,' said Master Jackie, in a threatening sort of tone, before I had been in the house ten minutes—'and we are going to live with you when Father and Mother are gone; do you like our coming to live with you?'

'I don't know yet,' I replied, not wishing to commit myself.

'Oh, that's very funny. Mother said you would like it awfully.'

'Did she now?' said I, in amused surprise.

'Yes, and there is the St. Bernard, and the cat,

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and my rabbits, and Phyl's bird. Phyl's bird has got a bad foot—it can't quite sit on its perch. It nearly can sometimes, but it generally tumbles off and has a fit at the bottom of the cage.'

This was a lively look-out for us! But there—we had Nannie's word for it that they were *good* children, though she said it who shouldn't.

And at last the awful day came when the dreaded good-bye had to be said. I don't know much about it, for I never said good-bye to Nannie myself. We all went down to the boat, where Jackie took a good deal of my attention by asking exceedingly awkward questions as to why so big a ship was called a boat. I represented to Jackie that I believed the 'Euphrates' was a troop-ship; but Jackie had heard it called a boat, and was not to be mildly talked out of it. I explained as well as I could, listening all the time to Nannie's sobs and last words.

But I never once looked at the poor thing from start to finish. I simply could not, and somehow it happened that she and I parted without any real leave-taking at all, and the last words I heard her say as they hurried us off the ship were 'Take care of my darlings, and write to me every week, Nell—every week.'

'Every week,' Nell called back; 'I'll write every week.'

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CHAPTER II

'THOSE CHILDREN'

It was a dreadful moment when the 'Euphrates' slowly moved away from our sight. I don't know what sailors call it—getting under way, I fancy. We all stood on the quay, a forlorn group enough. Phyl, who was the only one of the three children who really understood what the parting meant, was holding fast to Nell's arm, and the twins were watching the big ship with eager interest. I felt very queer about the throat myself, and the old nurse was weeping volubly in the background, while Nell, with white strained lips was murmuring words of comfort to poor Phyl. And all the time Bob Dare and Nannie were waving to us from the ship, although, poor souls, it was hard to distinguish them from the crowd of others who one and all were waving their farewells to those they had left behind. Oh! it was a dreadful moment, and I hope I shall not often witness the like again.

Jackie, however, broke the silence and the spell of pain which bound us in a manner peculiarly his own.

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'I wonder if they'll get drownded!' he remarked in an angelic tone.

Jackie is a beautiful boy, slight and fair, with heavenly eyes and a plaintive mouth. I heard Nell

'I WONDER IF THEY'LL GET DROWNDED'

catch her breath in a sob, and she put her arm around Phyllis, who positively howled.

I hastened to assure Jackie that it was very unlikely indeed that any catastrophe would happen to the 'Euphrates,' particularly at this time of year;

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and then I asked them if they would like to go into the town and get ices.

An ice is a small luxury, and cheap, and certainly that morning the half-crown that I expended in a pastry-cook's shop was worth its weight in gold. But although the current of the children's thoughts was diverted for the moment from the dreadful parting through which they had just gone, the idea of danger to the 'Euphrates' did not pass from Jackie's mind. For that evening while Phyllis was helping Nell to pack up a box of her mother's specially favourite bits of china, and the other odds and ends with which she had made her drawing-room pretty, I noticed my nephew sitting in the bow window by himself, crying quietly, as if his little heart would break.

I went over and lifted him bodily on to my knee. 'Old chap,' I said, 'are you feeling *very* lonesome? Don't cry, old fellow, you'll get used to it after a bit, and Auntie and I will be as kind as we know how to be.'

However, Jackie confided to me that it was not exactly lonesomeness that had been too much for him. He didn't mind their going hardly a bit, but he felt so sure they were going to be what he called 'drownded.' I talked to him for a long time, and he sat on my knee with his head resting against my shoulder, all the time looking like an angel, and really I was astonished to find how deep the child's feelings

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seemed, and what a cultivated mind he had considering his age.

Presently he looked up at me. 'What's that noise, Uncle?' he asked.

'Thunder, my boy,' I answered; it had been sultry for the time of year during the day, and was now threatening for a smart storm, and the thunder was mumbling and grumbling up aloft at a great rate. It is thunder,' I said.

'Oh! thunder,' echoed Jackie—then suddenly—'Who makes it?'

For one moment a wild idea flashed through my brain of telling him just how and why thunder was heard at all; then I decided in my own mind that Jackie was too little to understand anything about electricity yet, so I fell back upon the simple teaching which had been thought good enough wherewith to answer the questions of my own childish days. 'God makes it, my boy,' I said with suitable gravity. His answer, or I should say his comment, clearly proved to me that I have yet a great deal to learn about children.

'H'm,' he said cheerfully. 'Is He moving the furniture about?' That is the kind of questions which Jackie is always asking. They are very awkward, because in the first place I want to laugh, and in the second, I don't know what to say.

I must say I was surprised at the way in which

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those children behaved. I had an idea that all children cried when bedtime came, and that they were always breaking something and tearing their clothes. But then, of course, I never lived in the house with children before, at least not with children with whose management I was intimately concerned. I remembered that till I was quite a big boy I generally cried at going to bed, and if I did not break very many things, I was always in trouble for things which had been more or less mysteriously broken, which amounted to the same thing in the end.

'Do you know, Jack,' said Nell to me, when the thunderstorm had passed over, and the children had gone off to bed, 'do you know I feel almost as if I had got a dear baby of my own? I'm grieved for darling Nannie, of course, but you don't know the joy it is to me to have these dear little souls about me; it makes me so happy.'

I could not help laughing, though she looked so womanly, and so earnest over it. 'My dear, it is just as well that you do feel like that, for practically you had not much choice in the matter. We had to have them, you know, and it is an uncommonly good thing that you do love the burden.'

I must say, though, that I was *not* prepared for what followed. We went to bed, Nell and I, and a very good bed it was, and we slept the sleep of the just. And at half-past seven in the morning I was

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TWO LOVELY GOLDEN-HAIRED, LAUGHING GIRLS

awakened by a sort of avalanche of children, two lovely golden-haired, laughing girls, quickly followed by Master Jackie, untrammelled as to garments

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beyond their white-frilled night shirts, and with not even so much as a shoe to their feet. 'Nell, darling —Uncle Jack—wake up—your tea has come—tea, bread and butter, and letters—all lovely. Come, wake up, dears.'

That was little Cis—Cis was a twin with my friend Jackie.

'I may pour out tea, dear?' demanded Phyl, in quite a grown-up voice. 'Sugar, dear?'

These children have always a way of calling you 'dear' with a patronising air which I find inexpressibly charming, but which my mother would certainly have had a fit over. Even after this long space of time I shiver to think what would have been the result of calling my mother or one of my aunts 'Nell, darling.' But now that I hear my wife spoken to in those terms by a shrimp of under five years old I don't feel inclined to make anyone shiver—I like it.

All the same, as I watched Phyl carefully putting the milk and sugar into the cups, I felt bound to do my obvious duty, and 'shove a moral in.'

'Look here,' I asked, 'won't you get cold, you youngsters?'

They all echoed my words with as much astonishment as if I had suggested they might get wet or green. 'Cold, Uncle Jack, why, how could we get cold?'

'I don't know how you could,' I answered, 'but I

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do know that if *I* were to trot about the house in my nightshirt, and without any slippers on, I shouldn't be able to move for rheumatism.'

'What's rheumatism?' asked Jackie, who was busy scraping two lumps of sugar together over a bit of bread and butter.

Now what is the good of warning a child against rheumatism, when he is so aggressively healthy that he doesn't even know what rheumatism is?

'What's rheumatism?' he persisted. Jackie seems always on the thirst for information. 'Is it like castor oil?'

'Rheumatism is cold in the joints!' I said, severely. I dare say that I was altogether wrong—one generally is when one has to answer a child's questions.

'Cold in the joints!' repeated Phyl, promptly. 'Oh! then you're like Father, Uncle Jack. He can't bear cold meat.'

It would be hard to say whether Nell or I laughed the most; if anything, I think Nell had it, for I choked, and you cannot go on laughing when you are choking.

The three children sat on different parts of the bed and in various attitudes, yet each watching us with eager eyes full of anticipation.

'That was an awfully funny joke,' remarked Cis, nodding her head with an air of great wisdom; then she, too, went off into shrill peals of laughter, and

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Phyl eyed her with superior, yet affectionate contempt.

'She doesn't know what she is laughing at,' she exclaimed to Nell; 'but she's a dear little thing, and we never take any notice of her.'

'I say, youngsters,' I asked at that moment, 'do you do this sort of thing every morning?'

'Yes, *every* morning,' they answered as in one voice. 'Why, Father and Mother,' Phyl continued, 'wouldn't have *thanked* you for their tea, unless we had come with it.'

'Me darlings,' said a voice at the door, 'yer bath's waitin'!'

They needed no second bidding; in a minute they had all scurried away, and in less time than it takes me to write it, we heard them overhead splashing and shrieking like a brood of young ducks in a shallow pond.

'I wonder how Bob stood the crumbs *every* morning?' I remarked, rather ruefully, to Nell.

'Poor old darling!' she answered, laughing, 'I'm afraid you will wish them far enough, many and many a time.'

'I wish the crumbs far enough now,' I rejoined.

Well, that afternoon we went up to Town, bag and baggage, and in due course arrived at Putney. I must say that they were very good on the journey, and the next morning Nanna took them for a ride on

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the top of the 'bus, while Nell and I paid a visit to our friend, Mr. Hampton, that we might choose furniture for a couple more bedrooms and a day-nursery.

We did not think of asking them where they had been; indeed, we did not return till late in the afternoon, when we found them all clean and smart, waiting for their tea. But we soon found out; for just before our dinner I noticed Jackie very busy with a paper and pencil, and, as Jackie interests me immensely, I strolled over to see what he was about.

As I looked over his shoulder I saw that he had a nice neat correspondence card, of an oblong shape, with a neat device—a flight of swallows and a trail of flowers—filling up one corner, and on this he had printed something in very large capital letters. He was so engrossed that he did not notice that I was standing close to him, and he held his work out at arm's length with great pride, and surveyed it as a painter might survey his masterpiece.

TO
THE, LOVING MEMARY OF
MY DARLING MOTHER
WHO WAS DROUND AT SEA.
APRIL 14, 1852.
AGED 17 YEARS.

I knew in a minute where they had been! Old Nanna, like all her class, had not been able to resist

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a prowl in Brompton Cemetery, and Jackie, with his head full of his mother, had been committing some of the inscriptions of the tombstones to memory. It is true that he was a little mixed in his dates, having knocked ten years off his mother's age and put the year of grace back just forty years. But those were mere details scarcely worth mentioning.

'And then there was something else,' he went on aloud—'I think I'll put that too.' So, with infinite pains and labour, he added at the foot of the inscription—

HER END WAS PEACE.

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CHAPTER III

THE NEW WAYS OR THE OLD ?

ANOTHER week has gone by—to us a decidedly eventful week, full of unusual interest. I have come to the conclusion that these children of Nannie's are being brought up on a much better and more reasonable plan than was the fashion when I was a child. They have adapted themselves wonderfully well to their new abode. I suppose children are adaptive if they are anything. And they pervade the whole place from early morn till something later than dewy eve. We love them dearly, the wife and I, but we live with our hearts in our mouths, and only breathe with real freedom when we know that they are sound asleep in bed and will—unless something very unusual should happen—be heard no more until they descend in their accustomed avalanche on our bed when it is time for our morning tea.

After they had been three days at the Cedars, I consulted old Nanna as to their climbing propensities, for, really, Nell seemed to be in a continual state of palpitation of the heart, and I seldom saw her without

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her hand held hard against her side. But Nanna' philosophy is superb. 'The masther couldn't bear to have their spirit checked,' she explained. 'An' says he to me, "Nanna," he says, "nothin' 'll stand 'em in such good stead as good pluck. Just you stop 'em from breakin' their necks, and otherwise let 'em run as wild as they like." '

'That's all very fine,' I remonstrated, 'but how are you to keep them from breaking their necks if they happen to make a slip one day when they're hanging over the balusters? That's what *I* want to know, Nanna.'

'The blessid saints 'll protect 'em, Sorr,' answered Nanna, crossing herself.

Nanna's faith is really beautiful! And my nieces and nephew continue to climb up the iron balusters and to hang over the handrail, and Mrs. Winter and I still live with our hearts in our mouths. However, I caught Master Jackie in the very act yesterday morning of making a progress under the outside of the balustrade, and had a serious talk with him on the subject.

'I say, Jackie, what are you going up there for?' I asked—I remembered the moment the words had passed my lips that I ought to have turned the sentence the other way, but as Jackie was already about a dozen steps on his journey, I felt that time was precious and that there was none to lose.

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Jackie hung on with both hands and turned his heavenly eyes towards me. 'What's the matter now, Uncle Jack?' he said, answering one question by another.

'The matter!' I answered, severely. 'That you will break your neck, if you don't keep a bright look-out. And though your father and mother, perhaps, would not have minded that, *I* strongly object to anything of the sort happening in *my* house.'

Jackie evidently thought my remarks exceedingly funny, for he laughed and chuckled so much that he nearly lost his hold of the balusters. '*I* shan't fall, dear,' he said confidently. 'What should I fall for?' with a wondering look, as if to say, 'How can a grown-up person like you ask such an utterly silly question as that?'

'Probably because you couldn't keep hold any longer,' I replied, with an uncomfortable feeling that I had made out a very bad case and was getting the worst of it. Really, at that moment I was not sure that the ways of my own childhood were not the most commendable—no attempting to reason with a small mind that *won't* see as you see, no thinking of the delights of dangerous pleasures, no anything but a stern order, 'You mustn't do it because *I* say so.'

Jackie, however, did not know what was passing in my mind. He made no attempt to come down, but continued his argument from his post of vantage. '*I*

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shan't let go,' he assured me. 'Why, Uncle Jack, I went right up to the top yesterday. You come along too, and see what fun it is!'

No, the old system of complete autocracy was *not* the best. I am perfectly certain that when I was a child I should *never* have told such a fact, particularly when I was being 'carpeted' for being only about a dozen steps from the bottom. The frank and fearless assertion made me feel quite differently towards Jackie in a single moment.

'Now, listen to me, old chap,' I said, seriously; 'I don't want to stop your fun—I want you to have as good a time as you possibly can, you and Phyl and Cis too. But I don't want you to get climbing where you would kill yourself if you fell—d'you see? And I'm afraid it would kill you if you fell from the balusters, and—and—we shouldn't have a Jackie then, you know.'

I was very much in earnest over it, for, you see, I am not used to children, and the very thought of one of the dear little souls lying white and still on the stone floor of the hall made me feel sick and cold.

'Well, then, I'll come down,' said Jackie, and began to climb quietly down again.

'And you won't go up there any more?'

'No, Uncle Jack, I won't,' he answered.

He came down, and I gave him a few coppers I had in my pocket, and he went off to find the others;

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and I went off about my own business, feeling that I could trust that boy, mite as he was, to keep his word to me. And I am more convinced than ever that the new ways of training children are better than the old.

Nell says that they are all distinctly of a literary turn; and really I never did see youngsters with such a passion for pen and paper. The worst bruise, the most cruel pinch, the greatest disappointment, may all be healed by a sheet of paper and a pen; pencil is no good, there is very little alleviation to be found therein, none at all unless the little operator may be putting the pointed end into his or her mouth all the time. Of course, Phyl is the most advanced of the three; she can write a very nice little letter in a round hand between three lines.

And Jackie can print in capital letters very neatly, while little Cis, who is the most lovable little soul that ever drew breath, I do believe, has not yet mastered the art of writing even in its most elementary form. But regardless of that fact, the joy and delight of all the three is to get into my study and write 'letters.'

They cost me a small fortune in notepaper, besides having all the half-sheets of my not very small correspondence, and Cis will insist upon having real postage stamps and sticking them on herself. Very often, too, she persists in actually posting her effusions with her own hand, on being lifted up to the mouth of the post-box, and on carefully examining each separate

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'letter' before she drops it in. Nell says, 'Never mind, a few ha'penny stamps are cheaper than sweeties, and won't do the children any harm'—but I sincerely trust that Heaven and the Post-office will forgive me and overlook all our delinquencies, for in vain have I represented that, by shooting actual rubbish into the post-box, we are all liable to some very severe punishment.

To me the most marvellous part of these children's literary achievement is that they always distinguish perfectly between my work and my correspondence. They have only been in the house a few days, yet just now little Cis put her sweet little face in at the door and said: 'Jack, are you writing big paper?'

'I am,' I replied.

'Oh!' then the door was shut with a bang, and I was left alone in peace.

Now it was only yesterday afternoon that she came in and put the very same question to me, and I told her to go away. I was busy writing letters. 'I want to write letters too,' said Cis, with an air of dignity which would have befitted a statesman.

Dislodge her I simply could not by any means short of actual force, which I did not wish to use. Bribery and corruption I tried, but in vain; not even pennies in my overcoat pocket had any effect—at least, not the desired effect, for she went away and got the pennies, and then she came back to finish her

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letters. At last, finding it was no good trying to get rid of her, I gave her a sheet of paper and an envelope, and also a pencil nicely sharpened to a fine point.

'I want pem and ink,' she said, firmly—Cis has a curious mispronunciation of certain words, not apparently due to any inability to pronounce certain letters, or combinations of letters, but as if she had learnt to spell badly and had taken her pronunciation from the spelling.

'Oh, you'll make your fingers inky and mark your pinafore,' I urged; 'pencil is much nicer.'

'Then why don't *you* use pencils?' she demanded, triumphantly.

I could give no reason that was tolerably truthful, and I came to the conclusion that I had better let her ink her fingers, or even her pinafore, than tell her a lie; so I gave her a pen, and told her to be sure not to dip it too far into the ink. And so for fully half an hour that mite sat as still as a mouse, with her lovely golden head bent over a sheet of paper, which she covered with the most wonderful collection of hieroglyphics it had ever before been my lot to behold.

She closed and addressed (!) the envelope just as I finished my last letter. 'I want a stamp, please dear,' she announced. I gave her a halfpenny stamp. Cis looked closely at it. 'It's not the same as yours,' she remarked.

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'Where is your letter going?' I asked.

'To dear Mammy,' she replied.

'Well, mine are only English letters,' I said, feeling as if I was deceiving her shamefully.

But she never knew. She industriously licked all the gum off, and I had to come to the rescue with the gum-bottle. Then she slipped off her chair and came to my side. 'Have you done your letters?' she asked.

'I have,' I answered, putting my arm round her.

She wriggled herself right on to my knee, and picking up the pencil at which half an hour before she had scorned, thrust it into my hand, and found a comfortable place for her head against my shoulder.

'Jack, dear,' she said in a sweet little coaxing voice, with just a touch of command about it, 'Jack, dear, write me a donkey.'

Now I want to know how that little child distinguished between the use of a pen for a letter and a pencil for what she called 'writing' a donkey! Nell says it is entirely a matter of intuition, but if that is so, why is there not a little more intuition about grown-up people? It is a matter of great wonder to me that children should all be so bright, so original, and that most men and women are so hopelessly stodgy. Nell says I don't know what I am talking about, that it is ridiculous to judge all children by the

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standard of these exceptionally smart little souls. Perhaps Nell is right.

I had written thus far, when the door burst open and my two little nieces came in, Phyl nursing what to all outward appearances was an exceedingly large doll in an exceedingly motherly fashion; Cis, in high glee, bringing me two letters.

'May I open your letters, Jack?' she said, proceeding to do so without waiting for my permission. 'Four letters, all for you.'

'No, no!' said Phyl, in a superior tone (Phyl is just six), 'not four letters, Cis—only two. Really, you do ex-ag-arate so,' and then her baby gave a lurch and a wriggle, and walked off on four black and tawny legs, dragging a long infant's robe after it to the door, where it sat down and began vigorously washing its face with its paw.

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CHAPTER IV

TOFFY

THE other morning my wife came into my den and seated herself upon the one comfortable chair (except the one in which I always sit at my table) which it contains.

'I wanted to ask you, Jack,' she said, 'about one or two things. First—*do* you think I can afford another evening gown? I really don't think I can get on without it.'

'My dear girl,' I began, 'surely you know best what you ——'

'Yes, yes; but I always like to mention it,' she said, and I knew from her tone that the gown was already a foregone conclusion, and was only an excuse for a chat on a different subject.

'Well?' I said. 'Go on, Nell.'

'And I wanted to have a little talk with you about other things. You see, Jack, dear, it is now nearly May—Phyl is six and a half, and the twins nearly five. Now, what ought we do about a governess?'

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'A governess will be rather a nuisance,' I returned promptly.

'Yes, that is so. Yet they must be educated. They are really quite advanced for their age, and the question is—shall we get a morning governess, send them to the Kindergarten, or let them run wild till after we have had our holiday?'

I tried to look judicial. I succeeded in feeling like a fool.

'Let me hear your ideas,' I suggested.

'Well, my ideas are that I would prefer to have them under my own eye for the present.'

'Which disposes of the Kindergarten,' I put in.

'Well, yes. Then we might have a morning governess for just a couple of hours every morning.'

'And what is there against that?'

'Nothing, except that in July we have always gone away, you know, Jack; and I am sure you will not be well if you stop near Town during the hot months.'

'I don't mean to try,' I said, laughing.

'But Jack, *how* are we to go about as we have done each year since we were married, with three children?'

'We cannot very well. But I must go to Homburg for August. I shall have gout to a certainty after all those dinners if I don't.'

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'But, my dear—the cost,' said Nell aghast—she has a frugal soul, this wife of mine.

'It will do us all a lot of good, and after Homburg we will do a little tour, and stop a week at Ostend on the way home.'

'And that will bring us back about the middle of September,' she exclaimed in dismay.

'Then we shall be at home for the Lyceum first night,' I answered.

'But you hate Town in September.'

'Putney is not Town: besides, the youngsters won't hate a place with a garden like the Cedars at any time of year. And they are safe enough with Nanna—that elderly and remarkable person can very well take care of them if we want to go away by ourselves.'

At that moment there came a knock on the door, and in reply to my call of 'Come in,' the face of Nanna herself appeared.

'Hullo, Nanna!' I said. 'What's good with you to-day?'

'Sorr,' said Nanna, 'I've come to ask a plain question.'

'And you shall have a plain answer,' I replied.

'Thank ye, Sorr. The blessid saints protect you. But what I want to know is, how do ye expect that I can kape me blessid bairns in good health if, when they come downstairs, ye stuff them with rich plum

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cake that's enough to turn the stomick of a horse?"

I was puzzled. 'Hey?' I asked.

'Didn't they come down when ye had comp'ny yisterday afternoon, and didn't ye give Miss Cescily a big slice of cake—and the dear choild says that the mistress said it was Buszard—it wouldn't hurt her. I don't know what Buszard is at all, Sorr and Ma'am, but I do know that me blessid choild has been ill all night, and whatever Buszard may be there's currants in it, and currants are death to a babe wid a delicate stomick.'

'I did give her a bit of cake yesterday, Nanna,' said Nell contritely; 'I'm sure I'm very sorry if it was wrong. I wouldn't have given the dear child anything to hurt her for the world, and I've always pinned my faith to Buszard——'

'Then, Ma'am, you just know nothing about children at all,' said Nanna, speaking with the assured tone of experience. 'Wid regard to cake of any kind there's stomicks and stomicks. Now, Miss Cec'ly, she has a stomick that nothin's safe with except bread and milk. And Miss Phylliss, well, there's several things that go well nigh to killin' her if she have a bite of 'em. But Master Jackie, he's got the stomick of a horse or an ostrich, and its my belief that nothin' short of brass farthin's and iron nails would have much effect on him.'

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My poor Nell sat like a prisoner at the bar on a charge of murder, and as she evidently had nothing to say I came to the rescue. 'Well, Nanna, I'm sure we are both very sorry; you see we don't know as much about little people as you do. And next time we have visitors, you must come and tell us what they may have and what they mayn't have.'

Old Nanna made a deep obeisance. 'That was all I wanted, Sorr,' she answered. 'I'm sure a kinder Auntie and Uncle the dear children couldn't have, and when I think of what might have been wid the three dear little sowls put to school, and I remimber the day when the orders came and the poor misthress cried her poor eyes out; and—and the blissid saints 'll reward you both; and—and'—and then Nanna's eloquence came to an abrupt termination and she fairly bolted out of the room, holding her apron to her eyes.

Nell and I could not help laughing a little when she was gone. 'Talk of the angels,' Nell quoted. 'Well, I'm sure I'm *very* sorry about poor little Cis. However, I shall know another time. And what about this governess, Jack?'

'I should keep them just where they are,' I answered, 'so perhaps it would be as well to have a girl for a couple of hours in a morning, so that they shall not forget what little they know already. And as for the Homburg trip, we need not decide that now,

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but I'll write to old Schmidt at the Hôtel de l'Europe, and find out what he will take the whole lot of us for.'

Thus we left our summer holiday in uncertainty. My wife departed upon her own affairs intent, and I went on with the task of putting my correspondence in order,—no joke if one happens to have let a few days slip by without having troubled to keep everything up to date.

Nell had not been gone many minutes when the door was very gently opened, and Phyl came in. 'Big paper, dear?' she asked, with an air as if she were thirty and I a boy at my lessons.

'Not this morning, only letters,' I replied. 'What d'you want?'

'Well, I want two or three things,' she said in a perfectly self-possessed voice. 'First, Cis, has broken her best doll, and she is really in a dreffful way about it. *Do* you think you could mend it, Uncle Jack?'

'I don't know till I see it; I dare say I can,' I answered, thinking the while that Phyl was by far the prettiest of the three children. It is very odd, but I nearly always do think that the one who is with me is the flower of the flock; I suppose it is because I am not well accustomed to having little people about me.

'And then,' Phyl went on in her sweet, coaxing voice, 'we want to ask a great favour of you. May we make some toffy?'

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'Toffy!' I repeated, aghast at the very suggestion. 'Oh, you must ask Auntie about that. That's not my province, Phyl, not my province at all.'

'Well, dear,' she said, with patient expostulation, 'Auntie has gone out—to the dressmaker's—and

'WE WANT TO ASK A GREAT FAVOUR OF YOU'

goodness only knows *when* she will be back. We asked Cook, and Cook said not without leave, not on any account in the world.'

The tone was Cook's very own, and was vinegarish to a degree. I hesitated to offend that august person.

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'Perhaps Cook can't do with you messing about in her kitchen,' I suggested.

'We don't want to mess, and we don't want to do it in her kitchen at all,' Phyl explained. 'We are quite accustomed to making toffy, Uncle Jack.'

I was not a little staggered at a child of six using a word like 'accustomed' with such an air of dignity, but I felt doubtful all the same as to the advisability of letting them get playing with fire, which making toffy practically amounts to. 'You'll be burning yourself—scalding yourselves,' I suggested.

Phyl laughed outright. 'Why, we used to make it at home *often*,' she cried. 'And, you forget, Nanna will be there.'

'Where?'

'In the nursery, dear.'

'And how do you make it?' I confess I was curious to learn what depths of knowledge were stored behind the liquid wells of her lovely eyes.

Phyl edged herself quite close to me. 'I'll tell *you*,' she said in her most confidential tone; 'although we don't tell everybody, because *our* toffy is better than *any*body's toffy we ever knew. First of all you have a pan, a brass pan is best because it doesn't go black, then you have so much sugar and so much butter, and the squeeze out of two lemons and a tin of Swiss milk, and you boil it all up together. You mustn't boil fast, because if you do it will all froff up

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and run over, and then that makes the bars of the grate nasty and the master never likes the smell. I'm sure,' she went on innocently, 'I don't know why masters shouldn't like the smell of a bit of burnt toffy, but they never do; Nanna says so. Now *I* think it is quite lovely.'

'And your toffy is good?' I went on, questioning her for the pleasure of hearing her explanations.

'Good!' she echoed. 'Oh, Uncle Jack, it's a dream,' she replied, with rapture.

'Well, then, you can tell Cook it will be all right.'

She fled away to the door, but then uttered an exclamation and ran back again, holding her arms out towards my neck. 'Kiss-kiss,' she cried; then with a great hug, added, 'Dear, *dear* Uncle,' and the next moment I was alone.

About an hour after, the three came back in a kind of procession, bringing me some pieces of a whitey-brown substance on a plate.

'Jack, we have brought you some toffy,' they cried in concert.

In vain I tried to get out of it. In vain I represented that I, who was once young, am now old; that I should get the toothache and the indigestion, and that it would spoil my dinner, which would make Cook so angry that she would never let them have the wherewithal to make toffy again. But all in vain! I could have resisted threats and any ordinary coaxings;

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'JACK, WE HAVE BROUGHT YOU SOME TOFFY'

but when Phyl got on to my knee and twined her slim little arms around my neck, and said, in a perfectly grown-up voice, 'Do take a bit, Jack dear—do

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to please *me*,' why I just took the piece she indicated and put it into my mouth. It was a nauseous morsel which not even love could sweeten.

But they are the sweetest little souls, and even that toffy did not upset me for long. By the bye, last night I looked into the nursery on my way down to dinner. None of them saw me, for there is a screen at the door, over which I peeped. Phyl was sitting by the fire looking at a picture-book, and Jackie was trying to make the cat beg. Little Cis had at that moment knelt down before a big arm-chair to say her prayers, and she began in a sweet little audible voice, 'Our Father which art in India.'

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CHAPTER V

A LITTLE HOLIDAY

THE other day my wife looked up from a letter which she had just opened. 'It's from Mrs. Loveday, Jack, she remarked.

'Oh, is it?' I replied; 'what's good with her?'

'Well, she is very anxious that we should go down to stay with them for Whitsuntide. She says we've been promising her for two years that we would spend a few days with them, and that we have never gone yet. Would you like to go now?'

'I don't mind. What is the place called?'

'Wix—the White House, Wix,' she answered. 'And she says, and so very kindly too, "Do bring Nannie's children with you. We shall be delighted to have them, and the country is full of charms for little folk now. They won't be a bit of trouble, for I love children with all my heart." Now what do you think?'

'That I should like to go for a few days very much, but *not* with three children, which means Nanna and a heap of luggage and all that. No, I

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don't mind your taking Phyl if you like—she is bigger, and we can go without a maid. One of Mrs. Loveday's maids could do anything necessary for her, I suppose?'

'Oh, yes; and Phyl is a very helpful little person,' Nell said. 'I really should like to take her; it seems so ungracious to go without any of them when she has so specially asked them all.'

'Then we'll take Phyl,' I agreed.

Accordingly, on Saturday morning we set out from our own house to go down to Wix, which is a little village not many miles from Harwich. I must say the children were wonderfully good about it. Phyl's dignity must have been a little trying to the others, she was so very dignified. But neither Jackie nor Cis seemed to care at all. I gave them each a shilling, and left them perfectly happy in the garden digging a grave for an old doll of Phyl's, and the last we saw as we drove across the bridge was a procession of several small children—the twins and the little Morrisons at No. 8—going in state to the grave with coffin and banners, and one of them walking solemnly in front clad in a white night-gown. It was a nice cheerful kind of occupation for them, and they were quite happy.

In due time we accomplished our journey, and got off the train at the station for Wix—Wrabness, it is called. To my mind there is an old-world sound

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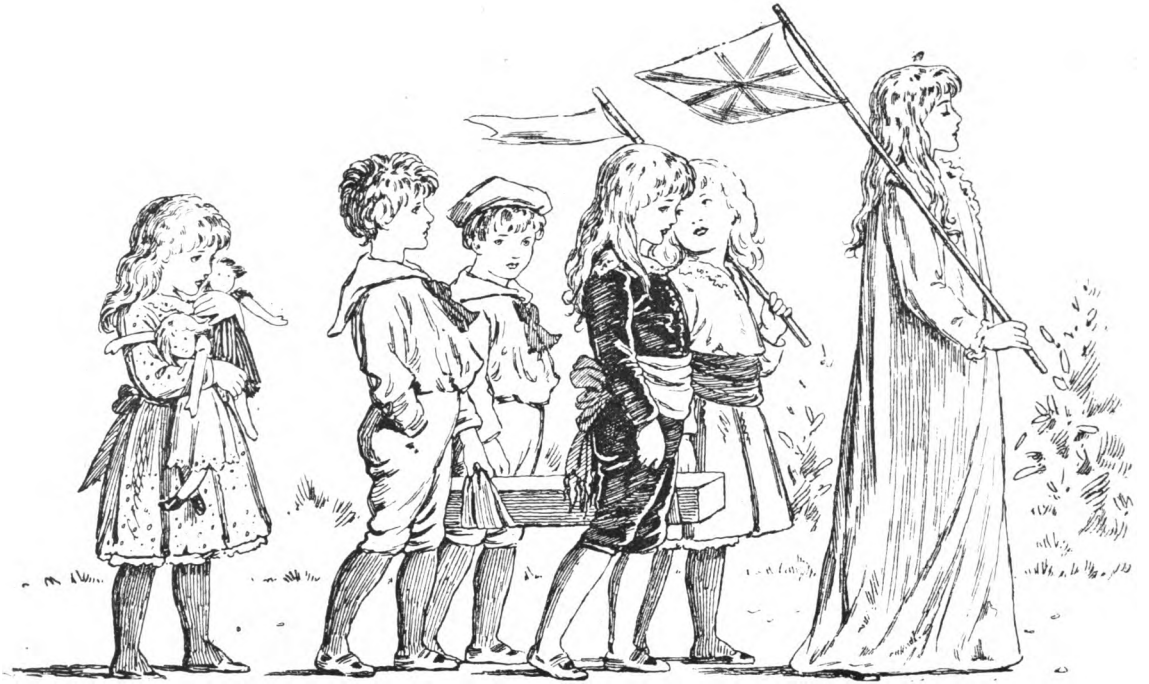

THE DOLL'S FUNERAL

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about the names; they convey an impression of fresh air and rustic primitiveness, which in itself is very restful to a town-bred brain.

There is a drive of three miles from Wrabness to Wix, and Mrs. Loveday met us at the station with a smart little turn-out drawn by a good substantial cob. 'And this is Phyllis,' she cried, 'dear Nannie's Phyllis! Why, my dear Nell, however did the poor girl bring herself to leave them? What a good thing that you and Mr. Winter have none, and what a God-send for you to have three given to you all at once without any of the horrors of teething and bandy-legs to think of!'

She chattered on like this until she had comfortably got Nell into her little carriage, and then she asked me to get in behind and take Phyl beside me. 'No, don't trouble about the luggage,' she cried; 'it will come on in the cart, and will be there soon after we are.'

By this arrangement I had the full benefit of Phyl's remarks during the whole drive, and I am bound to say that whatever escaped that child's notice was not worth noticing. She saw and commented on everything—the broken old pound at the first cross-roads we came to; the cottages by the roadside; the children on their way home from school with all the delights of holiday-time before them; a rat which suddenly bolted across the road, a party of

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sportsmen engaged in the interesting occupation of rook-shooting; the village 'softy' doddering along the pretence of a pathway; a brood of young ducklings and a clutch of chickens, apparently so young that this was their first airing; and a little spring which bubbled up in the very middle of the Queen's highway.

'Why does the water come up like that, Uncle Jack?' she asked. 'What sends it up?'

'I don't know—it's a spring. I suppose it has always been there,' I replied. 'The people are very stupid not to turn it aside into the pond there—it would keep it always full.'

'Why don't they?'

'That I cannot tell you, Phyl. Perhaps they don't know that it could be done; perhaps they don't care.'

'Shall I get down and go and tell them?' she demanded eagerly.

'I don't think so,' I answered. 'They might not thank you.'

At that moment Mrs. Loveday turned sideways in her seat. 'Look, Phyl,' she said, pointing with her whip across the fields; 'look, there's the White House.'

'Where? I don't see it,' Phyl cried, looking eagerly at a point about half-a-mile east of the house.

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'Look along my stick,' I said, and then she called out that she saw it, and that it was lovely.

It was a lovely place, truly, and it showed to better advantage when we drew nearer to it. For it stands on rising ground, and you approach it by a neat drive through a wide-spreading meadow, in which a number of great chestnut-trees give shade, and seven tall poplars stand like sentinels beside the entrance gate. The house is white and not high, with two windows on each side of the door, and five in the story above. The front door is shielded by a small circular conservatory filled with plants all in bloom, and a large conservatory is thrown out on the west side of the house and forms, with masses of luxuriant shrubs and trees, a complete screen to the stables and yard. The front of the house, as high as the bedroom windows, is covered with carefully trained ivy, and already the flower-beds were gay with bright flowers.

But to my mind the pleasantest part of the place was the air, so bright and brisk and full of life; it seemed to dance down into one's lungs as a glass of good champagne dances down one's throat at that kind of London crush which, nowadays, they are pleased to call a 'function.' I went to bed that night and slept as I have not for years known what it was to sleep except at a German Spa.

Really, it is very amusing. Phyl sat up to a late

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dinner, and Nell put her to bed herself, leaving her wide awake, where she sang 'The Garden of Sleep' for about forty minutes, until the sweet little pipe suddenly stopped in the middle of a line, and we heard no more until morning. Of course she slept in our room; and how kind and hospitable the dear Lovedays were to us, neither Nell nor I will ever forget.

'And wasn't Phyl sweet and good?' said Nell to me when we were safe in our own bedroom. 'Mary Loveday is quite charmed with her, and to-morrow Mr. Loveday is going to take her round and show her all the animals.'

Anyone with children of their own, or other people's for that matter, will understand our satisfaction at feeling that Phyl had proved a success on this her first visit with us. Neither of us knew much about children, and we had seen a good many bright sayings about little folks, very amusing to an onlooker, but very painful to those most nearly concerned. And to a certain extent we had gone down to Wix in fear and trembling lest something should slip out of a kind to make a good subject for 'Punch,' or a neat par. for the funny column of a penny joker.

And in the morning Phyl woke. She did not ask where she was or look surprised to find herself in our bedroom, but she watched the maid set out the bath and put a red-painted can of hot water in the wash-basin, and then she got cautiously out of bed and

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THE WHITE HOUSE

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came over to ours. It was the first time as yet that she had ever omitted the avalanche style of saying good morning. I suppose she thought it would not do to make a noise in someone else's house. Perhaps the absence of the others had sobered her. Anyway, from whatever cause it might arise, the fact remains the same that she sat perfectly quiet for quite three minutes, staring about her; and then she said: 'Why, Auntie, there's no tea.'

Nell jumped, positively jumped, and cast such a piteous look at me that I was quite frightened for a minute. But I saw she was all right, for she put her arm round Phyl and drew her closely to her.

'Phyl, my darling,' she began, 'you know in some houses they do have morning tea, and in some they don't. Mrs. Loveday has breakfast soon after nine. We don't have it till nearly eleven, so, of course, one must have a cup of tea in the morning. But you won't mention it to Mrs. Loveday, will you, darling? She would be so unhappy to think that she had not given us everything that we have at home, and I would not have her know for anything.'

'I understand,' said Phyl.

'You're sure you won't say a single word, my darling? You won't let anything "slip"?' Nell went on anxiously. 'You promise me?'

'Oh, yes, Auntie dear, I promise faiff-ful,' Phyl replied.

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So Nell gave her a hug, and jumping out of bed, gave her a bath and dressed her, sending her downstairs with a kiss and a last injunction not to say a single word about the tea. 'Remember if tea doesn't come up in the morning, that it's very rude to talk about it,' were Nell's last words.

'She's safe enough,' I told her, when Phyl was fairly gone.

'Oh, yes, if she thinks of it; but she is such a little thing to keep it in mind, and I'm so afraid it may slip out in very innocence,' Nell replied.

Presently we went down, and as nothing was said about the tea, we concluded that Phyl had been discreet, and I, for one, thought no more about it.

In the afternoon, however, the ladies had been for a drive, and Loveday and I had taken Phyl round to see the different animals about the place, and we all found ourselves in the drawing-room, glad enough to get near to the warmth of the fire.

'Oh, dear! I wish they would be quick,' cried Mrs. Loveday, with an impatient look at the clock. 'I am dying for a cup of tea.'

Miss Phyllis looked up from the puppy that she was nursing, straight at my wife. '*We* don't talk about tea, do we, Auntie?' she remarked in a tone of such superiority, mingled with rebuke, that we all went off into shrieks of laughter, although the Love-

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days had not the smallest idea why the joke was so funny, and have not to this day, so far as I know.

Well, we have come back from Wix with new views about our summer holiday. The Lovedays want to pay a long round of visits, then to do a cure at Aix-les-Bains in September, and afterwards to go with a party on a yacht for a few weeks. So they have offered to let us the White House for four or five months at an exceedingly reasonable rent, and as Mrs. Loveday is kind enough to say that there is nothing to spoil and therefore we need not be afraid of the children, why it seems to me that we cannot do better than migrate there early in June, with our manservant and our maidservant, so to speak, and the three little strangers within our gates.

By the way, Phyllis has the most extraordinary répertoire of songs for a young lady of six and a half. I heard her singing this just now, and she tells me she does not know where she first heard it, she only knows that she knows it :—

Love me, my love,
  Though life decay;
Life is a dream,
  Love is for aye.
Gold is but dross,
  Beauty a snare.
Love is for ever,
  Priceless and rare.

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Love me whene'er
Parted are we,
Love lives when life
No more shall be;
Beauty will fade,
Gold melt away,
Love lives for ever,
Ever and aye.

I took the youngsters to the Zoo the other day. Nell said at first that nothing would induce her to go, that she detested animals, and hated long journeys across London, especially when there was no reward at the other end. However, the youngsters would not be satisfied unless darling Auntie went, so Nell had to give way and make up her mind to the inevitable. Cis wanted me to take Nanna too, but I drew the line sternly at Nanna, who is very large, and a floppy sort of person, and is always wailing about her weight, and her feet getting tired. I must do the old woman the justice to say that she had not the smallest wish to go to the Zoo, or anywhere else that would involve much fatigue.

It's a far cry from Putney to Regent's Park, but we got there at last with the help of a good many applications to the various automaton appliances fixed along the route. First we tried butter-scotch, and then we tried chocolate, then we got weighed, and then we scented our handkerchiefs, then I went in for

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a cigarette, and then we measured ourselves, making more or less accurate shots at the proper allowance for our heels. And at last we reached the Mecca of our desires, and found ourselves in the land where lions dwell.

Cis was the first to make an observation worthy of notice, for as soon as she came within sight of the enclosure where the flamingoes are kept, she broke from Nell's hand, and ran towards them. 'Auntie, Auntie,' she cried, excitedly. 'Oh! do come and look—here's a long-stalked one!'

Nell's only comment afterwards about the visit, was 'And we stayed *all* day.' We did stay a long time, it is true, and I do not know that either she or I was especially edified, except in watching those children. And how they enjoyed themselves! They had never seen a real Zoo before, nothing better of the kind than an ordinary travelling menagerie of the class likely to be found in a small Irish town at fair-time. And they looked at everything and judged everything according to whether it was to be found in India or not.

'That's a lion,' remarked Jackie, after regarding the king of beasts with an attentive eye for some minutes. 'H'm. Have they lions in India, Uncle Jack?'

'Yes, there are lions in India,' I answered.

'I wonder if father and mother will keep lions instead of dogs?' he said.

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'No,' put in Phyl, with decision, 'they smell, and Mother can't bear anything that smells. Major Greville gave Mother an awfully val-able dog last year, and Mother had to send it away, it smelt so. But it wasn't half as bad as that lion.'

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CHAPTER VI

A LOVELY DAY

I WONDERED afterwards whether the king of beasts understood what the child said, for at that moment he uttered a roar loud enough to waken the seven sleepers or the dead, and sprang with all his force against the bars of the cage. Jackie jumped about a foot from the ground, but stood his ground bravely all the same, Phyl shrieked aloud, and little Cis hid her face against Nell's gown.

'I feel quite sure,' said Phyl, breathlessly, when we had all recovered ourselves a little, 'that Mother has *no* lions lying about her drawing-room in India.'

Well, we bought nuts for the monkeys and buns for the bears, and then nothing would satisfy those children except going for a ride on the elephant. Not that I minded that, only they would have me go too, and, when at last, I very reluctantly consented to go —for even the most amiable man on earth, as I am, does not always like to make such an exhibition of himself as riding on an elephant where every second

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person may be saying or thinking, 'Why, that's the man who writes the soldier stories; wonder he cares to make such an ass of himself as to take penny trips on an elephant,' and every other person may be saying or thinking, 'Dear, see that respectable-looking old gentleman enjoying of himself like a schoolboy out for a 'oliday' (have you ever noticed that the uneducated classes invariably speak of anyone past his first youth as an *old* gentleman? And, though many people like to speak of themselves as old, very few care to be called so by others in that particular manner)—nothing would satisfy them but that Nell should go also. And Nell had to go. My poor girl! My heart ached for her, for I knew she loathed the very idea of it, and I would have proved myself as hard-hearted as a flint, and would have insisted on her remaining as an on-looker only. But my Nell is very soft of heart. She had brought the youngsters out for the day, and would do everything they wished, if it was in her power. And, after all, it was really quite a simple business to walk up that ladder and sit down on the knife-board arrangement on top. Nor did it last long; though what Nell suffered during that short and sickening ride, I think nobody but herself and me will ever know.

We got into a little omnibus at the gate which took us down to the nearest station. The only other passengers were a lady and her little girl, and when

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we got in, the latter was running about the vehicle after the manner of children.

'Come and sit here, Dora,' said the lady, patting the cushion beside her.

Dora moved to the place at once, and seated herself quietly, and after a minute or so she looked gravely up at the lady, and said, without any rebelliousness or even petulance in her tones, 'Why should I always have to do as you tell me?'

For a moment the lady did not speak—evidently, indeed, she had nothing to say—then she said quietly: 'Well, I suppose because God made me your mother instead of making you mine,' and an uncommonly clever answer it was, too, satisfying the child and not committing the mother in the smallest way.

We reached home about half-past six o'clock, and Nanna met us at the door with the news that tea was all ready in the nursery, and that in consequence of their having had no regular dinner, cook had made them some rissôles and some macaroni. Nell dropped into the nearest arm-chair, and the children—they not a bit tired—all came to say 'Good-night.'

'We have had a lovely day, dear Nell,' said Phyl in quite her most grown-up tone, 'and we have all enjoyed ourselves *very* much. We shall be charmed to go again whenever you think you would like to take us.'

Nell began to laugh wildly. She was very tired, I could see, and I came to the rescue. 'Well, we'll

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talk about that another time,' I said. 'Auntie is tired, and your good tea is spoiling, so say "Good night," and be off, like little angels.'

When they were gone I got my wife a glass of port and made her sit still till she felt more like herself again.

'Jack,' she said presently, 'they are good little souls, and dear little souls, but do they never get tired? Their muscles must be like india-rubber, and their energy is stupendous. How do we ever get nurses, when one day almost kills us?'

'Oh, they get used to it.'

'They would die if they didn't,' she returned with energy; then caught hold of my hand. 'Oh, Jack, Jack! thank Heaven I haven't got to earn my living in that way; fancy having them always on your mind, night and day, for twenty pounds a year.'

'But Nanna does not feel like that. You forget, my darling, that one can get used to anything. Nanna has a childlike and quite charming faith in the Blissid Saints. She keeps them out of danger, but she does not worry herself as you or I do.'

'I suppose there's something in that,' said Nell thoughtfully.

Yesterday I was alone in my den when Phyl came mysteriously in. 'Dear Jack,' she said, 'may I come in?'

'Yes, I've knocked off work,' I answered. 'What

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is it?' I already know Phyl well enough to be sure that when she is mysterious she wants me to do something a little out of the common.

'To-morrow is Jackie's and Cis's birthday,' she announced.

I knew as much already; indeed, I had helped Nell to stow several large packages away on the top of the wardrobe in our bedroom, as being the only place in the house likely to be safe from the busy fingers of eager little mortals who knew perfectly well that their birthday was drawing nigh.

I told Phyl that I was aware of the interesting fact.

'But I want to give them presents,' she said.

'Well, old woman,' said I, 'I don't see that there is anything to prevent your doing so.'

'Well, in the first place I haven't got any money,' she said, with all seriousness; 'and, as Auntie sometimes says, that's distinctly awkward.'

The tone was so thoroughly Nell's, that I almost choked with laughter.

'Yes; want of money is awkward; most people find it so. And supposing I haven't got any money either? What then, Phyl?'

'*You* can easily get some.'

'Where?'

'Why, at the bank, of course.' She looked up at me half-wonderingly, as if to ask if I had taken leave of my understanding generally.

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'WELL, IN THE FIRST PLACE I HAVEN'T GOT ANY MONEY'

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'Yes; but I have to put it into the bank before I can take it out, you know,' I told her.

'How silly!' she remarked.

'Well, you wanted some money,' I went on, thinking that it was no use explaining the bank system to her.

'Yes, but that's a detail,' she said gravely. 'I know you'll give me that, dear! But dear, darling Uncle Jack, will you go with me to buy the presents? It is Auntie's day, you know, and she can't go; and Nanna will tell Jackie and Cis for *certain* what I buy if she goes. Nanna *couldn't* keep a secret—not—not if her life depended on it. Will you go, dear?'

I knew it was hopeless to try to get out of it, and as I had nothing particular to do, I was sure I should rather enjoy the experience than otherwise.

'Well, go and get your hat on, little woman,' I said, pushing my chair back, 'and be as quick as you can, because Auntie likes me to show on her day if I can.'

She flew out of the room, and I heard her go racing upstairs, shouting, 'Nanna, Nanna, I'm going out with Uncle Jack; I'm to be dressed at once, please.'

All the same she kept me waiting for full ten minutes, and I had to call twice before she appeared, a bewitching little figure in a plain blue serge coat, with a big blue hat bent and crooked into any sort of

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shape, and crowned on top with big bows of the same dark-coloured ribbon.

'Come, come, old woman, is this what you call not keeping me a minute?' I asked; 'and now you have come Nanna has to fasten your boots on the doorstep.'

We were not quite on the doorstep, but that did not matter. Phyl, however, was not at all ruffled by my remarks. She looked at me with her limpid, lovely eyes—you must forgive my raptures about these children's eyes, but as yet I never look at them without a thrill of pleasure—glanced down at the old nurse and up at me again. 'Hurry no man's cattle,' she said; 'don't you know, dear, patience is a virtue?'

'The blissid saints presarve me!' cried Nanna; but I—well, *I* roared.

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CHAPTER VII

A BIRTHDAY

I now began vaguely to understand why most people said 'Poor things!' when they heard that Mrs. Robert Dare had presented her husband with twins. Without doubt when the blessing of Providence comes in double quantities there are certain drawbacks which come with it. For instance, the two birthdays fall on the same day. And although one birthday cake does for them both, when uncle and auntie each have to give presents of equal value to each child, to say nothing of Phyl's sisterly claims to giving attentions of the same delicate yet preferably substantial description—well, then the keeping of a double birthday becomes a very serious question indeed.

I must say Phyl was wonderfully reasonable in her wishes. She knew what she wanted, and asked for certain articles as soon as she got into the shop to which I took her, which was Elliot's Bazaar, at Putney, in the High Street.

'It is my brother and sister's birthday to-morrow,'

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she explained, 'and I would like to give Cis a writing-desk if you have no objection.'

Naturally neither Mr. nor Mrs. Elliot had the very smallest objection to her giving her brother and sister

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anything out of their establishment which she (or I) had money to pay for. Mr. Elliot produced the desks, and Phyl chose an uncommonly nice one, well stocked

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with all things necessary for the correspondence of a young lady of position. Its price was seven and sixpence. I thought it rather a heavy addition to my own presents and Nell's, but submitted.

'And what for the little gentleman, missie?' Mr. Elliot suggested. 'Would you like to give him the same?'

'No, not a desk,' answered Phyl, promptly. 'If I do they will always be getting mixed, and you don't know how tiresome it is when they get mixed. We always give them different things. Jackie would *like* a drum, I know, but we can't do with such a noise as a drum makes at our house, because Uncle Jack writes books, you know. But if you have a very good collection of marbles I think he would be quite satisfied with a bagful of those.'

Eventually she chose a bag, a stout linen affair, and such a collection of marbles as perhaps never any boy had in this world before. 'Dear,' she said to me as we went home together, 'what is the difference between an alley and a marble?' I did not know, and told her so. 'Then what's a taw?' she inquired.

I did not know that either. I fancy, when I was a boy, we called them all taws or alleys indiscriminately. When we got in, however, I looked in the dictionary for her benefit, and as you may like to know also, I will save you the trouble of consulting yours. A marble is made of marble, and a taw is

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AS WE WENT HOME TOGETHER

a marble of much larger size. An alley is a corruption of alabaster, of which they are, or ought to be, made.

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Phyl's remark on this last piece of information was very quaint. 'Then alleys are made of skin?' she said.

'Skin?' said I, puzzled. 'Why, how do you mean?'

'Well, dear,' Phyl answered, as if sorry for my ignorance, 'alabaster is skin, isn't it?'

'I never heard of it, Phyl. How do you make that out?'

'Well, I heard Lady Conningby telling Auntie yesterday that her niece, Mary Travers, had an alabaster complexion.'

I tried to explain, but could scarcely do it for my laughter. Phyl wasn't a bit offended; she never is. On the contrary, she laughed as if a better joke than that had never come in her way.

The following day the birthday came off. We kept it with all the rites and ceremonies which had become traditional in the Dare family. What do you say? That I don't know the meaning of the word 'tradition.' Then you are very much mistaken, my dear sir, or madam, and I maintain that in this instance it is quite correctly used.

First of all, we had a specially prepared birthday cake, a sponge-cake affair with sultanas sprinkled here and there, covered with a quite transcendently lovely icing in white with edgings of pink sugar. On the top was a crown in silver, and surrounding were the words, 'Happy birthday to Jackie and Cis.'

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Our festivities, however, began long before the cake was brought to light, which was at tea-time. At eleven of the clock we all repaired in solemn state to the dining-room, where the presents were laid out in voluminous brown paper wrappings on the table. 'Dear heart alive!' remarked nurse, as she put her head into the room.

The twins were really very much excited, although they were outwardly fairly calm. I knew it by the small breakfast they ate, and the way in which they refused one thing after another.

'Do eat an egg, darling,' said Nell to little Cis; 'Auntie will cut you some nice toast fingers, and put just the yolk on them for you.'

'No, Auntie, I couldn't eat it,' said Cis piteously.

'Have you ever had a watercress sandwich?' asked Phyl, who was herself making a most substantial meal.

'I can't eat *any*thing,' cried poor Cis.

'Oh! you ought to eat watercress whenever you can; it's good for the blood,' remarked Phyl, wisely.

Her remark set me wondering, and sent my thoughts flying back to the days of the Psalmist. I suppose children were very much the same then as they are now. At all events, I never thought so much about the eighth Psalm as I have done since these three fresh young souls came into my life. How strange it is that there are men and women on earth to whom

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children are no joy, and many to whom they are an intolerable nuisance, even where they do not use more active ways of expressing their dislike.

I dare say when you get really used to having children about you, you get accustomed to treat their startling bits of wisdom for what they are worth, literal understudies of their mother or their nurse. But to me it is a new sensation to have children as part of my daily life, and I must confess that to see these mites, these shrimps, taking an intelligent interest in everything around them, to hear them expressing their sentiments and wishes in the ordinary plain English almost as good as I use myself, is to me, as yet, an unceasing joy. I have seen a good deal of children in books, it is true; but in literature children are always such babies—a little girl of seven or eight will talk a strange kind of gibberish which the long-suffering teacher has to translate before he can understand—this sort of thing—'Will oo div Bobbins a tiss?' 'Bobbins 'oves Mummy,' and so on. Now I maintain that at *two* years old, *some* children do make that kind of effort to be understood. For instance, only yesterday I had the advantage of hearing a voluble little maid just over two say, 'Bebbum go ta-ta, see bow-wow an' gee-gees'; but even her father and mother did not hold her up as anything but 'the sweetest lump of love in the world, but very backward with her tongue.'

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But I am forgetting the birthday display. Well, the twins walked in and we all followed, including Nanna, and we set them up on good high chairs at the table, and asked them which they would like to open first. They did not much care about that, so we gave them a parcel each, and I cut the strings and let them unfold the brown paper wrappings themselves. Such a collection it was! Indeed, there were more than fifty presents between them, and Phyl announced triumphantly that she had had thirty-seven on her last birthday. It seems to me that the times have changed, for I can never remember having more than seven presents on any birthday, until I was grown up and did not much care whether anybody remembered my birthday or not.

Perhaps it was as well, for I was an excitable boy, and would never have survived such a shower of good fortune as my nieces and nephew accepted with no more signs of outward excitement than that of eating an unusually poor breakfast. Nor did they hurry in opening the various mysterious-looking parcels. Indeed, when Cis after much patience at last brought a bassinette perambulator to light, she slipped down from her seat saying, 'I want to wheel my pram first,' and wheel her pram around she did, quite contentedly until Nell reminded her that there were still all the other parcels to be opened. This ceremony at

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last came to an end, and as the day had turned out wet Nell invited the three youngsters to have tea with her and spend the evening in the drawing-room. As I was invited also, I sat in a big chair listening to their chatter. And I must say Nell was an uncommonly good hostess on the occasion. She played, she sang, she showed them photographs and picture-books, and finally they all settled themselves on a wide Chesterfield lounge and cried loudly for a story. I think Nell was not sorry for any proposal which would keep them all quiet for a little while, and she began a wonderful story about two cats!

'There was once a fine large sleek cat who lived in a beautiful house with a good kind mistress who gave him his breakfast every morning, and his dinner every evening on a dinner plate, set on a newspaper to save making dirt on the carpet. As a rule Tom always carefully finished up every scrap that his mistress put for him, and often would beg for a bit more; but one cold winter morning before he had half cleared his plate he went to the window and made signs that he wanted to go out.

'"Miaou," he cried; "Miaou."

'"Do you want to go out, Tom?" asked his mistress.

'"Mi——aou," answered Tom, very loudly.

'"But you haven't finished your breakfast," the lady cried.

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'"Miaou, Miaou, Miaou," Tom answered impatiently.

'Well, the lady opened the window, which was a long French one, and Tom ran back to his plate, from

SHE BEGAN A WONDERFUL STORY ABOUT TWO CATS

which he took a big bone with a good large bit of meat on it, and he hurried away with it as fast as he could into the garden.

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'His mistress followed, curious to see what he was going to do with it, and to her surprise, saw that he carried it to a poor thin, hungry-looking cat, who was waiting about in the shrubbery. Tom tried hard to coax the cat into the house, but all in vain, and it was not until the lady had carried a plate of food out to the shrubbery for several days that he became less frightened of her, and at last allowed himself to be persuaded to venture within doors. Now,' said Nell, 'wasn't that rich cat kind and good to the poor one?'

'Oh! he was a dear, sweet, lovely cat!' they all cried.

'I wonder,' said Nell, taking little Cis's hand and stroking it tenderly down—'I wonder if my little Cis, who is having such a happy birthday, would give part of her dinner to a poor little girl, who was hungry and had no dinner?'

Cis looked thoughtful for a minute or so. 'No, I don't think I'd give my *dinner*, Auntie. It might get cold, you know.'

'But would you give one of your pennies to a poor little girl if you saw one?'

'But where *is* the poor little girl?' Cis asked.

'Oh! there are lots of poor little children about,' Nell replied.

'Well,' remarked Cis, 'I can't give a penny to *all*

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the poor little girls, Auntie, because I've only got two.'

And I very much fear that in the peals of our laughter, the moral of dear Auntie's story was lost for ever.

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CHAPTER VIII

I BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND

It is a very old saw which cries out upon borrowed plumes; and let me tell you that it isn't all milk and honey to have the care of other people's children. I never understood before why Bob Dare should have that abstracted anxious look about him at times, nor why Nannie, who is some years younger than my Nell, should have those two little upright lines between her pretty eyes. But I'm beginning to understand now!

Very soon after the youngsters came to us I had a very serious and a very unsatisfactory conversation with old Nanna anent the possibility of broken necks; and afterwards I had a very serious and wholly satisfactory conversation with Master Jackie on the same subject. I remember feeling very sick, and shuddering as there came to me a vision of a dear little golden-haired form lying white and still on the cold stones of the hall floor, and a great lump rose in my throat which I could scarcely get rid of without bringing the tears into my eyes. Aye, but I have learned since then of another danger worse, far worse to fight against than

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the sweet daring ways of childhood, a danger against which ordinary precaution may have no power, the issues of which rest with a higher Will than ours to decide.

It was nearly a week ago that, instead of the usual avalanche arriving with our morning tea, a ceremonious knock resounded on our bedroom door, and Nanna put her somewhat remarkable figure-head into the room.

'If ye plaze, Sir and Ma'am, can I spake wid ye?' she demanded.

Nell jumped up, propping herself on her elbow. 'Yes, of course, Nanna, come in. What is it?' she asked.

'Well, I won't say, Ma'am,' answered Nanna portentously, coming full into view, 'that annything's actually the matter wid me blessed bairns, but I am not altogether as satisfied with 'em this morning as I might be.'

The announcement was enough to make Nell sit up in bed. 'Are they *ill*, Nanna?' she asked in an agonised voice.

'Now, pray don't go to be onasy, Ma'am,' Nanna replied soothingly. 'I wouldn't be spakin' of it at all, for I know the master and yerself are not used to the ways of children. But I'd like to have the doctor, and that's the truth. Miss Cecily's not herself this mornin' at all, and even the other two—blessed lambs that

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they are, that same--they won't come down because I said she mustn't lave her bed.'

'But you *don't* think she's going to be very ill, Nanna,' Nell said imploringly. 'Send Parker off for the doctor at once—*at once*. There's plenty of time to catch him before he goes off on his first round. And I'll get up now, at once, Nanna. I won't wait for my tea.'

'Much better slip on your dressing-gown and go now,' I suggested.

'Really, Jack, you have more common everyday sense than any man I ever knew,' Nell cried. 'Then you go and send Parker off, and I'll come up at once and see the darling.'

'I will, ma'am,' answered Nanna, and departed on her errand.

Nell bolted out of bed instantly. 'Oh, Jack,' she burst out, as she slipped on her stockings, 'what shal we do if she's going to be ill, my sweet little Cis? I—I——' and then she stopped short, and began to grope under her pillow for a handkerchief.

I felt that it was time for me to speak. 'My dear girl,' I said quietly, 'it is no good working yourself into a fever about it. If the child is going to be ill, we can't help it any more than Bob or Nannie could. We had to take the chance of their being ill or well, you know; we took them, as we took each other, for better or worse.'

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Nell sat down on the edge of the bed and wiped her eyes.

'Yes, I know—it's very silly of me, Jack—but—but I've got so fond of them, the dear little souls, and I can't bear to think of their being ill—and—and——'

'Oh, I dare say it's a false alarm. Anyway, run up and see for yourself, there's a good girl.'

I do not know what it was that made me do it, but as soon as Nell had gone, I got up and shoved my bags on and a jacket, and I went up to the nursery likewise.

There were four rooms on that floor—the large day-nursery and a pleasant room opening out of it, where the two little girls slept; at the back of the house was Nanna's bedroom, and a little room opening out of that again, which my friend Jackie had for his own. I went into the nursery, where a bright fire was burning, near which a big old chair—one of the relics of my bachelor days, to be precise—was drawn, and in this, wrapped up in an eiderdown, with a pillow behind her, was little Cis. Nell was kneeling on the floor beside her. Nanna stood at the other side of the fire busy with something in a cup, and Phyl and Jackie were standing close by watching Cis with eyes full of commiseration.

She—Cis, that is—turned her head when I entered. 'It's Jack,' she remarked, holding out her hand. 'I'm very ill, Jack,' she added, in a very important tone.

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'Oh, come, I don't think you're so very bad, old woman,' I answered, for the child looked bright and bonny enough. I saw, though, on a closer inspection, that her hands were burning, her lips dry, and her eyes suspiciously bright. She had more colour, too, than usual; and even as I held her little hot hand, she began to cough in a strangled, short way, which made old Nanna turn her head quickly to look at her, and draw down her lips in a way which I knew meant no comfort to one who could read the signs of the times in her face.

'It's there—it's all on her chest,' my Nell cried. 'Nanna, *don't* you think I had better get a poultice on at once?'

'No, Ma'am, I don't,' the old woman answered. 'The last time Miss Phyllis had an attack like this the doctor specially warned me against poultices. "Now don't you go puttin' poultices on, Nurse," says he; "poultices is all well an' good as a last resort; but," says he, "they w'aken the chest, and they be apt to make the patient delicate, and the best thing ye can do is to set the stame-kettle goin', and kape givin' somethin' to throw the faver out of the blood."'

'It sounds sensible enough,' I said at this point; 'but why don't you start the steam-kettle going at once, Nanna?'

'Sure, sir,' cried Nanna, 'ye can't start a stame-

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kettle in a could grate. Susie's gettin' the fire a-light in the bedroom, and the kettle 'll be staming away like a windmill in half an hour.'

'I want a drink, Nanna,' put in Cis, who had kept on with that little 'tchety' irritating cough all the time.

'A drink, me lamb?—an' sure it's a drink ye shall have, darlin',' Nanna answered, giving her a drink out of a cup.

'What is it?' Nell asked.

'It's milk, Ma'am, wid a little wake tay in it,' Nanna replied; 'it seems to cut the phlegm.'

At this moment Parker appeared. 'I have taken your tea into the bedroom, Ma'am,' she said to Nell.

Parker disapproves intensely of the new additions to the family. *She* has no anxiety about the children, in fact the expression of her face (and there is no duty on facial expression, more is the pity, for *what* a difference such a tax would make either to the budget or to the faces of the general public!) betokens usually that she looks upon Mrs. Dare's children as an unmitigated nuisance. Certainly, since she has lived with us, over two years now, she has never seen either of us roaming about the house at eight o'clock in the morning in the most unstudied of toilettes, not to say sketchiness of clothing.

Nell turned her head. 'What did the doctor say?' she asked eagerly.

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Parker's whole person was an indignant protest. 'I've not been *yet*, Ma'am,' she answered.

Nell sprang to her feet. 'You have not been—has nobody been?'

'No, Ma'am—I thought——' Parker began, when down came Nell's foot on the floor with a bang.

'Woman—what business had you to think?' she cried. 'Who asked you to think? You had your orders——'

'Nanna came and *asked* me,' Parker began—and her face and manner were a protest, by this time, against the presumption of Nanna even asking her anything.

'You had your orders from me,' Nell thundered —'don't waste time arguing there. Go, this instant —this instant—GO!' and Parker, with an indignant sniff, vanished.

'Nay, Ma'am,' said Nanna soothingly, as Nell fumed on about the delay, 'it's not so urgent as that. The doctor 'll only order just what I'm doin' now. Pray go an' get yer cup o' tay and dress yerself, and ye'll be ready whin he comes. An', Sir, have ye wan o' them things for measuring the hate of the room?'

'A thermometer? Yes, Nanna; would you like it?'

'I would if ye plaze, Sir,' she answered.

'All right, I'll hang it up—or send Susan for it. It's in my study,' I replied. 'Come along, Nell, you can come back to Cis when you're dressed.'

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I must do Parker the justice to say that she lost no time in getting up to the doctor's house, which is ten minutes' sharp walk from the Cedars. And before Nell was quite dressed (and she wasted no time about it) Susan came up to say that he had come.

Nell went to him at once and I met them on the stairs on their way up. 'They are my sister's children, doctor,' she was saying, 'and it makes me so *much* more anxious about them than if they were my own.'

'Not a bit of it,' he answered promptly; 'you wouldn't feel the least differently, my dear Mrs. Winter, if they were twenty times your own, not the least. Ah! good morning, nurse,' as he followed Nell into the nursery where Nanna stood curtseying her best. 'And which is the little invalid? Not either of these, eh?' with a look at Phyl and Jackie.

'No, it's Cis, my sister Cecily,' Phyllis volunteered, putting her tiny hand into his outstretched one. 'She's gone back to bed.'

'This way, Sir,' said Nanna, opening the door, through which he disappeared, followed by Nanna and Nell.

I sat down patiently to await their return, and Phyl climbed on to my knees.

'Dear little Cis,' she said, slipping her arm round my neck; 'it is hard lines she should be ill like this.'

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CHAPTER IX

IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

When Dr. Murray and Nell came out of the child's bedroom, he seemed to have very little to say. 'We cannot tell yet,' he said, cautiously; 'but the nurse seems to know very well what to do for the present—keep the steam-kettle going, use the embrocation on flannel as I told you, and keep up her strength. Give her as much beef-tea, chicken broth, or Brand's essence as she will take, with plenty of milk, or milk and soda water, with just the chill off.'

'No stimulant?' Nell asked.

'Not yet; we will see later. I will come in again during the afternoon.'

Nell looked at me, and I saw that her soul was turning sick within her. 'Doctor, is it *very* dangerous?' she asked, piteously.

'Not at all dangerous yet,' he answered, smiling. 'I want to prevent it ever getting dangerous at all. Why, Mrs. Winter, I thought you knew my plan better than to be frightened because I am going to look in again—go often, while you can do some good.

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It's no use for a doctor to go in twenty times a day when the patient is beyond hope. In the beginning he can do good—in the end, very often, he can do nothing.'

'NOW, MY FINE FELLOW, HOW OLD ARE YOU?'

Nell tried to pull herself together. 'I'm so nervous about them, doctor,' she said. 'If they were my own I should be more used to them.'

'Yes, yes,' he replied, kindly. 'And now tell us,

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Mrs. Winter, how are our friends here?' looking at Jackie and Phyl.

'I think they are all right'—doubtfully.

'Well, we'll just have a look at them. Now, my fine fellow, how old are you?'

'Five,' Jackie answered.

'Five!' echoed the doctor; 'then——' looking at Nell.

'Yes, they're twins,' she answered.

'Ah! that's grand—grand. And now let me have a look at your tongue. H'm—and your throat. Yes—well I'll listen to that dickey-bird of yours, and see how he sings to-day'—whipping out a stethoscope, and putting it to Jackie's small person, in several parts. 'Ah! yes—yes. Oh! I don't think there's much the matter with you. All the same, Mrs. Winter, it's not the warmest weather in the world just now. I shouldn't let them be out too late in the day, and I should keep this young gentleman out of that room. The more quiet the little girl is kept the better, and one never knows how these things pass on from one to another.'

'But you don't think it's anything infectious with Cis?' Nell cried. 'It's *not* scarlet fever, doctor?'

'I think not—I can't say for certain what it is for a few hours,' he replied; 'but if it is only a simple feverish cold, you cannot be too careful with little people of this age—with people of *any* age in fact.

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Besides, the little one will be best kept as quiet as possible. And now let me see my little friend here—tell me what is your name?'

Phyl went forward, very much as a belle in her second season might approach the person of her Sovereign.

'Phyllis Dare,' she said. 'My tongue's quite well this morning, thank you.'

'That is good news,' returned the doctor; 'but would you mind my making sure of that fact myself?'

She lifted her lovely eyes to his, and answered, with the frankest laugh in the world, 'Why, of course not; but I told you, because *I've* been ill before, you see?'

'So you know all about it?'

'Yes,' with perfect gravity, 'I know all about it.'

Well, finally, he pronounced Phyl to ail nothing, and went away, promising to send what he called 'a little diaphoretic,' for Cis in the course of half-an-hour.

He has a wonderfully comforting and reassuring way with him, that doctor of ours; and he contrived to leave Nell that morning in quite a cheerful and easy frame of mind. I was not so sure about it myself, though I did not dare to tell Nell so, and when he came in about five o'clock and listened to the poor child's chest again, examining her throat and asking innumerable and apparently trivial questions, and finally said in a casual sort of manner, that he should

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probably look round again about nine o'clock, I made up my mind that poor little Cis was just about as ill as she could be. Indeed, I followed him out to the door, under pretence of opening it for him.

'Is she very ill, doctor?' I asked, in an undertone. He did not look at me as he answered.

'Yes, Mr. Winter,' he said, 'she is—very ill.'

'But there is nothing——'

'There is nothing more to be done at present. I have given the nurse full instructions. I'll look in again at nine o'clock. The great thing is to keep her quiet and the temperature without variation.' Then he slipped out of the house and was gone.

I felt as if he had signed my death-warrant. I did not go back into the dining-room where Phyl and Jackie were, but went straight up to the nursery, at the door of which Nell met me with a quivering face and eyes blinded with tears.

'I was just coming to find you, Jack,' she said, in a quavering voice. 'I want you to bring me up a bottle of brandy and a bottle of your best port—*that* port, dear.'

That port meant a few bottles of '47 port which had been left to me by a rich relative who left half-a-million of money to found a home for decayed gentlemen. I remember at the time of the old man's death, that we had said to each other that he might have taken a small share from the endowment in order to

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prevent a hard-working relative from ever becoming eligible for election to that particular institution. However, it being too late to alter existing arrangements, we did not repine, and the few dozen of '47 port had gone into our modest cellar, and from that time had not unnaturally been treated as something too sacred for use, except on very extraordinary occasions. Ah, me! I had never thought I should have to use it to coax grim death away from one of the three little dear lives which had crept into my heart and taken possession there.

I turned to go out of the room. 'She's very ill, Jack,' said Nell, in a piteous voice.

I would have given anything at that moment to have been able to turn round and discuss the child's illness in an ordinary unmoved tone; but I couldn't —it was no use. I couldn't even ask her if the doctor had told her what was the matter with the child. So I just stood there with my back towards her, looking at the ends of my fingers (which I could not see), and waiting for her to tell me something more.

'He has ordered poultices,' Nell went on, 'and brandy.'

I turned round then quickly enough. 'Nell?' I cried.

'Yes,' she said, looking at me mournfully.

'Is she going to die?' I whispered the horrid

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words. I could not bear to say them aloud, lest saying them should make them come true.

'I asked him that,' she answered, 'but—but—I think he did not hear me.'

'Then,' I exclaimed, 'there is no time to lose!' And I went out of the room and ran downstairs to get that brandy and '47 port, as if the child's life actually depended upon the speed with which I could bring them. And so in a measure, of course, it did; and as I had remembered to take a corkscrew with me, I was able to give them both bottles for use as soon as they were ready for them. Indeed, just as I drew the cork of the bottle of brandy, the door of the inner room opened, and Nanna appeared on the threshold.

'The lamb was askin' for ye just now, Sir,' she said in an even cheerful voice; 'would ye like to go in and sit by her a while?'

'Yes.'

'Only ye won't let her spake no more than can be helped, plaze? Is the wather boilin' for the poultice, Ma'am?'

'Yes, Nanna;' and my poor Nell dashed the tears away and tried to copy the old woman's cheerful tone.

'Nay, now, Ma'am,' said Nanna, 'ye must control yer tears, an' not let me darlin' see 'em.'

'Oh, Nanna, I wish I could!' Nell cried, breaking down again.

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'Ye must,' answered Nanna. 'I'm sure, Ma'am, ye don't wish to take away the darlin's chance because of yere own failin's. There'll be time enough for

I STAYED THERE HOUR AFTER HOUR

weepin' if the Almighty takes her. An' till then there's plenty of work to do in tryin' to save her.'

It was such an excellent sentiment that I swallowed

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that lump in my own throat and went into the bedroom, resolutely determined to give way to no more weakness while the child remained alive.

It was plain to see, even for the most limited understanding, that little Cis was very, very ill. She turned her heavy eyes on me, and said something about 'dear Jack' in a hoarse whisper, which seemed to be dragged up from the poor little tortured lungs below. Her face was fevered, her hands burning, her pretty golden head wet with the steam which filled the hot room. And oh! how hot that room was; it seemed to me that but for the vinegar which they had put in the steam-kettle, I could not have stayed in it for more than five minutes.

As it was, however, I stayed there hour after hour, not doing much to help Nanna and Nell, but just sitting there holding one of the child's hot hands, while the two women did all that was necessary—changed the poultices, kept up the fire, replenished the steam-kettle, and kept coaxing drops of sustenance into the little patient's unwilling mouth; it seemed to quiet her to see me there. And at nine o'clock Dr. Murray came back, felt the pulse, listened to her chest, and looked closely at her eyes. 'Yes,' he said, as he stood up by the bed and looked down upon her; then he looked at me and gave a quick gesture with eyes and head to the nursery door.

I followed him out. 'I'll stop here for an hour

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or two,' he said. 'The child is very ill, and the next three or four hours will pretty well decide the case one way or the other.'

'She is in great danger?' I asked it as a question, though I knew the truth well enough.

'Just like that,' and holding his hand out moved it to and fro, scarcely more than a hair's breadth.

'What is it?' I whispered.

He looked straight at me. 'Pneumonia,' he answered—'both lungs.'

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CHAPTER X

'IF ME DARLIN' HAD DIED'

With all my heart and soul I hope and pray it may never fall to my lot again to go through another such night as that which followed Dr. Murray's verdict of 'Pneumonia—both lungs.'

From early morning the dread and horror of what might be had been creeping slowly, but surely, upon both of us. What old Nanna thought I could scarcely make out; all her energies and strength seemed to be concentrated upon the child and the business she had in hand of dragging her through this illness, if it lay within human power to do it; her face expressed nothing, her voice was perfectly unemotional, her hands as they busied about the child were steady and firm. I no longer wondered that Bob Dare and his wife had learned to set the high value upon her that they did; they had had reason for it without a doubt.

And now that it was plain to be seen from the doctor's face, eyes, tone, his whole manner, indeed, that the child's dear little life was hanging in the

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balance, and that a turn of but a hair's breadth one way or the other would carry the issues of life or death with it. I seemed for my part to realise, all at once, how the Psalmist had felt in the days of old, when he foretold the evil that should fall upon the ungodly:—'And it shall come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones.' I knew in that awful moment that the Psalmist had himself gone through just the same agony of fear that I was going through then. Nobody could *imagine* such an appalling simile; of a surety, it could only have been the outcome of personal experience. As the words left the doctor's lips, I seemed to shrink to only half my usual size. A cold thrill ran down my spine, and in the flash of an instant there came before me a dread picture of the blank which would fall upon the house if the dear little soul was taken away from us, and the impossibility of our ever being able to make Nannie Dare believe that we had left *nothing* undone which could possibly have saved her; we should never be able to convince her that, if she had been at home, she would not have been able to save her.

It was the doctor's voice which brought me back to my ordinary senses again: 'Will you go or send up to my house, and ask them to send the steam-kettle down?' he said. 'We will set it going in this room, and then it will be the same air when the door

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is opened. And could we not cover up the outer door of that room '—with a gesture towards the sick-room —' a little more? I fancied I felt a slight draught from it just now, in spite of the curtain over it.'

'I could put up a rug on the outside,' I suggested.

'Yes; but no noise, please,' he replied.

Eventually I went down and sent the cook up for the extra steam-kettle, and myself got a heavy blanket, which I put over the outside of the outer door of the sick-room, fastening it every few inches with drawing-pins, of which I happened to have a good stock. And then there was nothing for me to do but to sit down and wait, which I did in the day nursery, keeping myself occupied by tending the fire and replenishing the kettle.

Twice I ventured in without my slippers on to take a glimpse of little Cis, who seemed but between unconsciousness and wandering; but I only went twice! Coward as you may think me, I could not stand the sight of the agony in my Nell's eyes, as she sat beside the bed. It was the first time in all the years that we have been married that I had seen my girl in trouble without trying to comfort her. I wanted to kiss her then—I was aching to kiss her, but I did not dare to do it for fear that it might break down the calm restraint under which she had put herself. So I went back to my poor little task of keeping the fire bright and the kettle sufficiently full,

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and to the thought of what we should be able to say to Bob Dare and Nannie, who had left their children to our keeping.

About half-past one o'clock the door opened softly, and the cook crept in, bringing a jug with her and four large breakfast-cups.

'How is she, sir?' she whispered.

'I do not know. She was alive when I was in last,' I answered. 'The doctor won't let me stop more than a minute or so.'

'I brought some strong beef-tea for the mistress and the others,' she said. 'It often depends on the strength of them as is nursing at such times, and I don't mean her to die, poor little angel, for want of support of them as is doing for her.'

She lifted the corner of her apron, and wiped her eyes, and I got hold of her hand and shook it hard. 'Cook,' I said, 'you're a good woman. Your poor mistress in there is nearly beside herself with fear and grief. I've been in, Cook,' I went on, 'once or twice, but I daren't stop, because I can't stand the sight of the little thing fighting for her life, and——'

'It may please the Almighty to spare her,' she put in solemnly.

'But it may please Him to take her,' I answered; 'and what are we to say to their mother if——'

'Nay, now, sir, don't you get thinking like that,' she said quickly. 'Never was there little ones

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tenderer treated than you've treated them. Nanna and us'll bear witness to that any time. Leave it in God's hands, sir, and do the best you can all the time —that's the only way to do. Won't you take the mistress a cup of this now, sir, and Nanna, too? It'll help to keep them going. Anything that's wanted, just pull the bell, sir, and I'll come.'

'Oh, hadn't you better go to bed, Cook?' I suggested, taking the little tray with three cups of beef-tea from her.

'I wouldn't go to bed and leave you all like this for a mint o' money, sir,' she said promptly. 'I sent the girls off an hour ago, and very unwilling they was to go. Now, sir.'

I kicked off my slippers, and went gently in. They were all very quiet, Nell still sitting beside the bed, the doctor bending over it, and Nanna standing anxiously by. Little Cis was lying still now; but her breath came in heavy gasps, and the sound of it was terrible. I stood, waiting till Dr. Murray should turn round, which he did in a moment or so, after giving her something with a teaspoon.

When he saw me, he came to look into my tray. 'The very thing,' he said, in an undertone, and took the cup to Nell. 'Drink it,' he said, imperatively.

She took it at once. I saw that she was too far gone in terror and anxiety to gainsay him. He gave a cup to Nanna, and then took one himself.

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'How is she?' I whispered.

'If anything, a shade better,' he answered. 'The next hour or so may do wonders.'

I crept out of the room; then I gave the joyful news to Cook, who was waiting to serve me with my portion of the beef-tea. 'God be thanked for that!' she ejaculated, then wiped her eyes with her apron again. 'I'm a bit crusty at times,' she remarked, with a sniff; 'but it's a comfort now to think I've never uttered a cross word to that dear lamb. Only yesterday morning she come down into my kitchen, and she says—"Cook," she says—"I really think you do make the very beautifullest gravy I ever tasted in all my life"—and to think of her lying there like that, poor darling,' and then, with another sob, she betook herself hurriedly away.

I had nothing to do but sit down again, and wait for news from the other side of the closed door; but at last—it seemed like an eternity, but was in reality only about an hour and a half by the little clock on the chimney-shelf—it opened, and the doctor came out.

'There is a distinct change for the better now,' he said cheerfully. 'She is asleep and breathing almost quietly. Can you persuade your wife to come out here? I will sit by the child for the next hour or so.'

I went in at once and looked at the child. I saw

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that she was relieved, and that she was, as he had said, sleeping quietly. And then I took my girl by the hand, and drew her out of the room. To my surprise, she made no resistance, but when I had closed the door softly behind us, she turned round with a face so ghastly pale that I caught her in my arms.

'Is she dying?' she said. Her lips were trembling so that I could hear nothing; I could only guess at her question.

'Dying?' I answered. 'No, my dearest, she is better, distinctly better; we shall pull her through, after all;' but the good news was too good for my poor girl, who clutched hold of me tight for a minute or so, and then burst into a passionate torrent of tears.

My dear Nell—my dear girl—such tears as those are soon dried.

'I was so frightened,' she whispered. 'What should I have said to Nannie, if——'

I repeated all the comforting things that Cook had said to me, and then I told Nell that she was sitting up, and rang the bell that she might come up and hear the good news.

'Why, Ma'am, you look fagged out,' she said when she had heard and cried a little over the joyful tidings. 'I'll go down and make you a cup of tea, it'll refresh you better than anything.'

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I REPEATED ALL THE COMFORTING THINGS COOK HAD SAID

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Well, Nell had a cup of tea and then went back to little Cis's bedside again, and for two hours more all was very quiet and still. Then Dr. Murray came and fetched me. 'She is awake and asking for you,' he said. 'Be very careful.' Thus warned I went in and bent over the bed.

'Jack,' she said in a weak little voice, 'dear Uncle —but I wanted Jackie, dear Jackie.'

It was then between five and six in the morning —I looked at Nell, who in turn looked at Nanna, who said at once that she would go and fetch Master Jackie.

'No, no, Cis wants Nanna,' came in the weak voice.

'I'll go,' I said hastily.

'Phyl too,' more faintly.

'Fetch her too,' ordered the doctor promptly.

Thereupon I went to Jackie's room. He was asleep, fast asleep, with a photograph of himself and Cis fast held in his hand. 'Jackie, my friend,' I said quietly.

He opened his eyes at once. 'Uncle Jack,' he said in a whisper.

I knew what he meant. 'No—much better—but she is asking for you, and I have come for you,' I said. 'You will only be able to stay a minute or two.'

I lifted him in my arms, and as I crossed the

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CIS ONLY SEEMED TO WANT TO LOOK AT THEM

landing, the door of Phyl's room opened and she came out, following me into the nursery. She walked

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straight up to the doctor. 'Is my sister worse? Is she dying?' she asked him.

'No, my little friend,' he replied. 'She is much better; we have got the worst over.'

And, after all, Cis only seemed to want to look at them. She smiled, and passed her little hot hand over Jackie's, and then she slipped off to sleep again, and Dr. Murray motioned to me to take the two children away.

I carried Jackie back to bed after giving him a drink of milk, and Phyl conveyed herself back to hers with a remark that she had not slept much, and would 'take it out' now that she knew darling little Cis was better. And then the doctor brought old Nanna out into the day nursery, where she distinguished herself by sitting quietly down and fainting away.

'Yes, a little brandy,' said the doctor; 'it has been a long strain, but in ordinary households that child would have been dead hours ago.'

Old Nanna came round presently, and sat up in her chair again.

'I feel a bit quare,' she remarked. 'Ah! a cup o' tay, me dear,' she added to Cook, 'it's like yer kind heart to think of it. Oh! sor, if me darlin' had died I would never have dared to look the mistress in the eyes again.'

'Nor I, Nanna,' I rejoined quickly.

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CHAPTER XI

BRIGHTON

They are soon up and down, these little ones who make the sunshine of our lives, and in one week from that awful night of agony, little Cis was practically herself again. She was treated as an invalid, of course, and, indeed, for a week longer than that was not allowed to move out of the two rooms, both of which were kept day and night at a certain temperature. Still she was out of her bed and dressed, was able to lie on the sofa, then advanced to an arm-chair and a pillow, then able to go down on the floor and play with the especial favourites among her toys.

And I need hardly say that during that fortnight the nursery was the centre of attraction at No. 5, The Cedars; by a common instinct we all betook ourselves there when we wanted to find anyone, or to impart news of any kind; it was the last place to which I went before I left the house, and the first that I sought when I returned to it, while Nell, I can safely say, spent every moment with the child that was actually possible.

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Well, when the fortnight was nearly over, we began to think about taking a little change. Dr. Murray was not very keen on Cis being taken in the direction of the east coast so soon after such a severe attack of pneumonia. 'Brighton is more like the place,' he remarked uneasily.

DOWN ON THE FLOOR TO PLAY WITH THE ESPECIAL FAVOURITES AMONG HER TOYS

'Then Brighton it shall be, doctor,' I told him. 'In any case we cannot go to the White House until June 15; this is May 21. There is plenty of time for a preliminary canter to Brighton between the two dates.'

The end of it was that as soon as the doctor pronounced her fit to make the journey, Nell and Phyl

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set off to Brighton a day in advance of the entire regiment—yes, I think it is a proper use of the word —to look out for rooms. I must say that I was exceedingly uneasy at the idea of Nell going all by herself on such an errand. Nell, however, only laughed at my fears.

'Am I a heathen Chinee?' she asked, in derision. 'Do you think, you dear old thing, that I have not got an English tongue in my head, that I am not able to take care of myself?'

'It is not that,' I explained, 'but it doesn't seem to me the right thing for you to be going round cadging for rooms; you've never done it before.'

'We have never needed to find lodgings,' she said, quickly.

'I would much rather go myself,' I expostulated.

'Yes, so would I. But you wouldn't remember about the beds, and you—oh, you would make an awful mull of it,' she cried gaily. 'And if you went with me I shouldn't be able to sleep for wondering if Nanna would manage to bring them down safely the next day. Besides, I *know* she would get scared at Victoria, or still worse if she attempted Clapham Junction. My word!' she went on in quite an ecstasy of enjoyment, 'but just think of Nanna, with those children and all the luggage, stranded at Clapham Junction—think of it!'

I did think of it, and it decided me that Nanna

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could not be left to follow us to Brighton. Therefore I saw Nell and Phil safely off at Clapham, and went home—as I always do when Nell is away—to a house that felt empty.

About five o'clock I had a telegram from Nell:—'Have got very good rooms; seven guineas a week.' Seven guineas a week! I was beginning to understand something of the difference between having children and no children. However, considering that there were six of us, that we were bound to have a second sitting-room for Nanna and the youngsters, and also three bedrooms, it was perhaps as reasonable as one could expect.

We went off to Brighton the following morning, and Nell met us at the station—'Such lovely rooms, Jack,' she remarked jubilantly, as we drove along the chief streets. 'It's rather a lot of money, of course, and I quite expected, at this time of year, too, to get what we wanted for about five guineas. We drove down to the front of the Grand Hotel as soon as we got here, and started up that quaint-looking little street where we once went to call on the McAnnallys. Do you remember? I think,' she said plaintively, 'that I asked at *every* house! Seven houses took fright at the very sight of dear Phyl. "We don't take children" was the answer I got, and they each of them shut the door in my face before I had time to get off the steps. You don't know, Jack, how queer I felt. I began

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to think at last that the people thought I wanted to steal something, and at one or two houses I was more than half inclined to do as Mrs. Charley Brooks did that day at her mother-in-law's.'

'What was that?' I inquired, for mothers-in-law are a class who interest me not a little.

'Well, Charley's mother is very rich, and a little odd now, and as she has all her own servants still with her, they do pretty much as they like. Mrs. Charley was there one day, and had stayed a little longer than they liked, or had found some fault or other. And the butler, to mark his disapproval, or to show how far he could go, let her out at the door, and immediately closed it behind her without seeing her into the carriage. Mrs. Charley promptly rang the bell, and, when he opened the door, said quietly, "Oh! I hadn't quite gone, Wilson," and, of course, he had nothing to say but a confused murmur that he had thought his mistress wanted him. "Oh, no," said Mrs. Charley, "I think Mrs. Brooks would rather you saw me into the carriage in the usual way." I felt just like that, Jack,' she ended.

'My poor girl,' I cried, 'I did so hate your coming alone like this, for Phyl is not much use, though she is such a jolly little soul.'

'Oh! well, never mind. And then,' she went on —'I tried another house, small, and not at all smart, but very clean and wholesome. Five guineas, and

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then the landlady caught sight of Phyl, and she froze up. "Oh! we don't take children," she said. I was so tired, Jack. I was just ready to cry, and I said, "But *why* don't you take children? I'm sure ours are the sweetest children in the world, and not a bit of trouble." "I can quite believe that, ma'am," she said, in a most patronising tone, "but my papa has let lodgings for forty-seven years and has always set his face against taking children. Many's the good 'let' that we've turned away, but it's his rule and he won't break it."

"'Oh! I don't want to be taken as a favour,'" I said, as quietly as I could. She unbent a little when she found I was going, and her elderly countenance wreathed itself into a feeble smile.

'"I'm sorry I can't oblige you, ma'am," she said as a parting, "but you see I must consider my papa; old gentlemen *is* inclined to be partic'lar."'

'I assure you, Jack,' Nell went on, 'that in the whole of Cannon-place I only found one woman able and willing to take us. She was an untidy, dirty-looking woman, with warts on her face, and she was stout and short of breath, and had seen better days, but now did the cooking. Her husband made himself useful and cleaned the boots and knives, and her daughters did the housework and waited on the visitors. "All in the fam'ly and pleasant-like," as she put it. They were five guineas, too, Jack,' she

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went on plaintively, 'but the rooms smelt stuffy, and all the chairs and tables wobbled. I thought you would never stand *that*, Jack.'

'Oh, impossible. Makes one ill to think of it,' I said hurriedly, for it hurt me to think of my girl parleying with and apologising to people of that sort for the sake of the difference of a guinea or two in the entire cost of a trip to the seaside. 'You ought to have gone round to the front and tried the better houses.'

'Yes, but I thought I could wait,' she replied laughingly. 'You know how I hate to be beaten, and I had made up my mind that five guineas a week was quite enough for us, and I really meant to stick at it until I found rooms at my price. So we toiled patiently round the little square at the top of Cannon-street, and everywhere we found that they either did not take children, or else that they had not room enough. Phyl was very funny about it. "Dear auntie," she said to me when one untidy old person had answered, "Oh, dear no, we have not *five* rooms" —"Dear auntie, is it swaggerer to only have two rooms to let instead of five?" and I assure you, Jack, I laughed so I didn't feel half so tired. Well, then we made our way into Regency Square, not that I expected to get anything there at five guineas, even in May. However, the very first house we went to, they had just what we wanted. It was clean, well-furnished, and the husband, who had been a butler,

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and the wife, who had been a cook, were both equally good and nice. Their price was only five guineas, too, but they had promised to wait till five o'clock before they let their rooms, as someone had been there, and was telegraphing to Town for a decisive answer. I very nearly cried, Jack, for it was only half-past three, and I felt as if I *couldn't* hang about till then on the chance of being taken in—only a chance—after all.'

You don't know, my dear readers, what a brute I felt. I could only hold my girl's hand, and wish I had been there to have saved all this useless heroism. 'I shall never let you go away by yourself again,' I said fondly.

'Ah! you're too good to me, Jack,' she answered. 'Well, we went all down Regency Square; but, of course, there are not many houses there where they have lodgings. And then, just as we got to the corner, I said to Phyl, "Phyl, it's beginning to rain. We'll try that one house, and if they can't take us, we'll go and have some lunch, and try again afterwards."

'It was raining quite smartly by that time,' she went on, 'and I was so tired, and my feet *ached*, Jack, and they were *such* nice rooms, and *such* a nice manageress; West Pier Mansion it is called, and though it really did seem a lot, seven guineas——'

'Oh, my dearest, do stop!' I burst out. 'I can't

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bear to hear you. Why, my poor child, you ought to have gone there first. One would think I had tied you down to a few shillings.'

'Dear Jack,' she said softly, and moved her hand to and fro as it lay in mine, with a curious little caress all her own.

'Well, so I took them, and we went right away to a tuck-shop and got a good tea. We felt so different. But I must tell you what Phyl said about it.

'"They're beautiful rooms, Auntie," she said, "and I think Jack will like them."

'"But they really *are* a lot of money, Phyl," I replied.

'"Well yes, dear; but do you think Jack will be angry?"

'"Angry? no," I said.

'"Because," she said, gravely, and looking at me with her sweet great eyes, "if he is, we then might put something out of our money-boxes towards it, eh, Auntie?"

'And I couldn't laugh, Jack,' Nell went on. 'I tried to laugh it off, and tell her that you wouldn't need that, and then I had to send her to fetch me another bun to give me a chance of wiping my eyes.'

We drew up at the door of West Pier Mansion just then, and I had to jump out and see that the luggage from our carriage was taken safely in before

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the second vehicle with Nanna and the youngsters could draw up. Phyl was the last of that batch to alight, indeed I lifted her down myself.

'Phyl, my woman,' I said, as I held her in my arms, 'kiss me.'

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CHAPTER XII

BEDS AND BEDS

After a life to a certain extent long, and to a certain extent laborious, I have come to the conclusion that the most rare art in the world is the art of being a good hostess. In London there are many kinds of hostesses. You have the hostess of ordinary society—the lady who sends out her cards for an 'At Home,' given either in the afternoon or the evening, who dresses superbly, and stands at the top of the stairs in a fashion-plate sort of attitude, and shakes hands with the guests as they come, and gives each one the same simper that she bestows on the parting guests as they go; the lady who thinks it is *the* thing not to introduce her friends to one another, and will let the stranger who knows not a soul in the room go supperless or tea-less away, feeling chilled and miserable, and altogether out of it.

On the other hand there is the hostess who is, for the time being, the mother of those who enter her house to partake of her hospitality, the hostess who

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is genial and essentially comfortable to know, although possibly at times a trifle embarrassing in her efforts to make you known to those with whom you have a deadly feud, or in trying with the best intentions in the world to explain away misunderstandings which you would probably rather hug to your bosom that they may increase and multiply.

Still these two are only types of the hostess of an hour—the dullest and dreariest party can be brought to an end, so far as you individually are concerned, in less time than that, unless you happen to have been so foolish as to send your carriage away until a certain hour, when you are really planted, unless the coachman happens to have put up somewhere very near to the house of your detention. But it is the hostess of a week who ought to possess the art of entertaining to a nicety, and I think it may be for the benefit of mankind in general if I venture to digress slightly from the account of Bob Dare's children, and express my views on the subject of good *versus* bad hostesses.

You are thinking, perhaps, that all this can have no possible connection with a fortnight's visit to Brighton, spent in a lodging-house. Well, there you are wrong, my dear sir or madam, for those qualities which make your hostess in private life distinctly good, are precisely the same qualities which have the effect of making you wish to go again and again

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to the same quarters when you visit any of your favourite holiday haunts.

And now for the essential qualities themselves. What are they? Well, first and foremost, taken as the root of all evil either in the houses of your friends or in the simple lodging, let me put the bed! Ladies —I do not mean your great hostesses who can give a house-party of a thousand people, more or less, but you who have your modest and comfortable town-house with its nice spare room and its one or two little bachelor cots, or you who have your roomy old country house in which you can stow away half-a-dozen people besides your own family—ladies, let me with all the powers of persuasion with which it has pleased a bountiful Providence to bless me, let me entreat you, first and foremost, to look to your beds. I grieve to say that in this age of tinsel and sham there is a growing tendency to have what only *seems* to be the best, not what undoubtedly *is* the best. And to any ladies who wish their guests to have a good time and to thoroughly enjoy themselves, let me beg of you not only to provide good beds, but also to sleep in them yourselves now and again so as to make quite sure that they are up to the mark to which it should be your great aim, as a hostess, to attain. It matters nothing whether the bedstead is a plain affair, costing from thirty shillings to two pounds, or an elaborate specimen of the brass-founder's art, for very few

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sleepers are troubled with the lust of the eye. It matters very little in the way of comfort whether there is a frill all around the article or not, indeed, I fancy most people would rather that there was not, as nervous ones are assured at a glance that the festive burglar would not hide himself under a frill-less bed, and cleanly ones know that the housemaid's broom is not so likely to overlook the places that are open to the light of day, as those that are shrouded in chintz or cretonne. But for the bed itself—ah, there's the rub! A good bed is such a beautiful thing, such a foretaste of that rest, for the weary body and the restless mind, to which we all look forward when this world's broken peacefulness shall have come to an end. For my part, I prefer a good box-spring with a fine hair over-mattress, then a blanket just the size of the mattress, and then a large linen sheet carefully tucked in all round. I particularly detest the way some housewives have of shirking the use of the bolster-case, and wrapping the bolster in the end of the sheet; in nine cases out of ten it results in finding your toes on speaking terms with the blanket, which with me always necessitates my getting out of bed and pulling the whole affair to pieces and remaking the entire bed. If, however, you don't happen to have such articles as bolster-cases by you, there is a way of managing the end of the sheet so that the occupant of the bed can get through the

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night without swearing at the loose sheet, or finding his face in contact with the rough ticking of the bolster. In this way; instead of merely laying the sheet over the pillow and pushing it a little way underneath (so that the first time the sleeper turns over he finds under him an unpleasant, loose, wrinkled, creased portion of sheet), simply lay the bolster on the outside of the sheet, and roll it downward towards the foot of the bed until the bolster is wrapped in the sheet one and a half times round; then put it up in its place at the head of the bed, and you will, with an ordinarily long sheet, find that you have just enough to tuck in smoothly and comfortably at the other end of the bed. Dear, dear, I fear I explain this very badly, but no one expects a man to have all these little household phrases just at his finger-ends. Only, dear ladies, I can assure you that the man, poor wretch, often *feels* when a thing is wrong just as quickly as, or perhaps more quickly than, his wife does. For the rest, a good linen sheet on the top—and if your linen is fairly fine and well aired, you need not trouble about frills or lace edges, or even about open-work hems, they are quite superfluous, as also are large monograms worked in the corners; then a light, fleecy blanket, an ordinary quilt or bedspread (anyway something which is taken off at night), and a light eider-down quilt with little air-holes pierced in various parts of it.

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As to pillows, it is best to have a hardish one and a softish one, and then the sleeper can take the one he most prefers. And to a very faddy person in the matter of pillows, I would say, 'Make a rule of taking your own, whenever you go to stay in a strange house;' the trouble and inconvenience are nothing in comparison with the benefit you will get.

It isn't half a bad plan to keep a feather-bed in the house, for some elderly people do not sleep for several nights after they find themselves even on the softest of spring mattresses, perhaps not at all. Then all the benefit and pleasure of a visit is completely lost, and everybody is the worse therefor. But this is, of course, very much carrying entertaining to a fine art.

I remember once going with my Nell to stay a week with some people in a rambling old house in the Midlands. I shall never forget that week, never as long as I live; no, and not even if I should live to be a thousand years old. It was a pretty house, standing quite isolated, and on the top of a hill. There was an ingle-nook in the dining-room, and a spring-mattress —no, I mean bed—in our sleeping-room. And I know that as long as I live I shall remember that bed. It will live in my memory for ever, and I should know it again if someone carried it to South America, and I happened to be visiting in the neighbourhood and found myself invited to repose upon it.

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It was neither a chain nor a box-mattress, but consisted of a series of strong spiral springs, like an easy-chair without any stuffing.

On the top of the spiral springs was placed a very thin hair-mattress, and the whole arrangement was hung with dainty pink and white dimity, further adorned with edges of embroidery and streamers of pretty pink ribbons, until, as Nell remarked to me in an awed tone: 'Really, Jack, it seems a pity to get into it.'

And it certainly was a pity, as we found out as soon as the witching hour of night crept upon us. Nell got in first. Her opening remark was, 'Oh I say!' Then she gave a sharp groan, and, sitting down on the nearest chair, began to rub her leg vigorously, and with many expressions of self-pity for her misfortunes. 'What's the matter?' I asked, for Nell really is the most inclined to make the best of things of any woman I ever knew. 'What's the matter?'

'I've shinned myself dreadfully,' she answered; 'I think I'll get in with a chair.'

And so she did, whereupon that bed set up a series of sounds like half a dozen pistol shots. 'Oh, I say,' cried Nell, nervously. 'Whatever can that be, Jack? Is the thing going off?'

Yes, that was just it. It went off with every movement, even the slightest, for a whole week; and

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we went home at the end of our visit with shins bruised black and blue from knocks as we got in, and calves swollen and sore from scrapings as we got out, and I can safely say that *nothing*, NOTHING would ever have induced us to sleep a single night in that house again. All the same, Nell took an opportunity of investigating the bed whereupon our host and hostess wooed the fair goddess Sleep, and found—a good box-mattress of the most approved shape. Truly a hostess ought now and then to sleep in her spare beds! It might cause a little extra outlay, but she would be the gainer in the matter of friendships.

Doubtless a chain mattress is a delightful article for those who do not want to spend a larger sum in a box-mattress, but any more ingenious instrument of torture than a chain mattress fixed on to an old-fashioned bedstead which rejoices in wooden laths cannot well be conceived if it happens that the chain has stretched a little and needs to be screwed up more tightly. I really think, on the whole, it is worse than the spiral affair which I have just described.

I think the hardest bed I ever slept on was in a very smart lodging-house at Scarborough, and the next hardest in a certain fine hotel at Ramsgate. At Harrogate and Weymouth also we have fared exceedingly badly in the matter of beds; but I seriously declare that the worst bed I ever slept on in my life was in the spare room (the spare room again!) of a

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very smart and fashionable lady in London. The room in which it stood was a dream of artistic furnishing, money had evidently been no object in providing for it. All the same that bed was simply wicked, and I felt sure that she, generous and hospitable soul that she is, had never had occasion or made occasion to pass a night therein herself.

Well, at last I have got back to our lodging at Brighton, and after such a disquisition on beds, it is only fair to say that to our surprise we found that all the beds were very decent. Indeed, I took the earliest opportunity of conveying my sentiments on the subject to the good manageress of the establishment, and I now commend them to all those good ladies at whose doors my poor girl had knocked in vain that weary afternoon when she and Phyl went on their pilgrimage. We settled ourselves down after lunch was over, for Nell always believes in arranging her things—ladies always call their portable property 'things,' you know—before she gives herself up to the mild dissipations of a new place. So she settled down to her unpacking, and I to a new novel in which I happened to be especially interested that day. And then towards four o'clock the children came down, Phyl and Jackie looking as robust as young tars, and Cis with the glory of her new sailor suit somewhat hidden by a smart reefer jacket, which seemed to have broken out in an eruption of gilt buttons.

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'Dear Jack,' said Phyl, 'we are going out.'

'All right, I suppose you'll be somewhere on the

'THANK YOU, MY LITTLE SNOWDROP'

front,' I answered. 'We shall be coming across you presently.'

'We have got two shillings amongst us, out of our

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money-boxes, you know,' Phyl explained, 'in case we see anything we especially fancy——'

'Oh,' cried Cis, who had gone to the window, 'black men.'

Phyl left her sentence unfinished, and the three heads were at the window before you could have said 'knife,' and in a twinkling a whole troupe of niggers had formed into a semicircle in front of the window within the paved drive which divided us from the foot-path.

I had not seen a troupe of niggers for years, not to watch them, that is. How strange it is how the companionship of children brings back your youth to you. I must admit that I enjoyed the entertainment enormously, taking the keenest interest in a somewhat dilapidated *Ally Sloper*, who seemed to be the leading spirit of the whole company.

But the revival of my youthful pleasures cost me dear. The niggers at Brighton have the reputation of making a lot of money, but the half-crown that Cis carried out—Cis escorted by Jackie and Phyl—was apparently such a rarity with them that they call upon us for further orders twice every day now, and in season and out of season I hear one or other of the youngsters singing in a childish pipe :—

'Sister Mary walked like that—
Pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat.

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Then comes uncle short and fat—
Ha—ha—ha—ha—ha!
And Uncle Thomas walks just so—
Oh—io—io!
And I walk like this, you know—
Oh—i—o!'

'What did you send them, Jack?' Nell asked as the dusky ones bowed themselves away.

'Half-a-crown,' I answered.

'It is rather a lot, isn't it?' she remarked. 'I suppose they were very pleased,' turning to Phyl.

'Oh, yes,' said Phyl promptly. 'Cis went out on to the steps. "Here, black man," she said, and *Ally Sloper* made a great bow, and said, "Thank you, my little snowdrop." I suppose he thought Cis looked ill,' she added.

Nell looked at me, an anxious question in her eyes. I knew what she meant, and made haste to answer:

'Oh, no, she's pulled down and peaky-looking. She'll soon pull up again in this air. Don't worry about your things any more, Nell. Put on your hat, and let us go down the King's-road.'

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CHAPTER XIII

THE 'SKYLARK'

Our life at Brighton was simple and peaceful enough. Nothing in particular happened, excepting that Cis 'picked up her crumbs,' as the saying is, with every breath that she drew, and the other two developed such outrageous appetites that, seriously, on those occasions when they came down to a meal with us, I began to feel quite nervous as to ultimate results.

But, on the whole, Nell and I did not see much of them; they were up and about betimes in the morning, generally looking in on their way to the beach whilst we were at breakfast. They would be out all day, that is all the morning, come in and have a huge lunch, no, I mean dinner, and then be off again on some expedition of their own devising. Twice I took Phyl and Jackie out in the 'Skylark,' however, and Nell, who is an indifferent sailor, went for a drive with old Nanna and little Cis.

Those trips in the 'Skylark' were very funny, very amusing, and very little of the humour of the situation was lost upon my small niece and nephew. The

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first time we had our photographs taken—well, so we had the second time also, but it was only upon the first occasion that I expended the shilling necessary to become an owner of the little gilt-framed bit of glass, which, as a matter of fact, gives me a sweeter portrait of Phyl than I have ever had before.

ON THE BEACH AT BRIGHTON

In the very middle of the picture is your humble and obedient servant, and Phyl is standing beside me, holding on by the ropes—I don't know what these particular ropes are called—and with her little fair face and lovely, serious eyes looking straight towards you, looking right out of the picture, that is. Un-

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fortunately, just at the critical moment Jackie slipped off his perch that he might make some private investigations at the end of the little craft, and therefore he missed being taken in his habit as he lives.

We were a very lively party, although I individually did nothing to add either to the general hilarity with which we started, or to the subdued gravity with which we returned to our moorings. The Captain was jocose, and spared no pains to keep up the spirits of his passengers. 'Will any lady or gentleman oblige the company with a song?' he inquired.

At first no one responded; then a young lady shyly volunteered a song, and rose to her feet amid a shower of thanks from everyone present.

And she really was shy, that obliging young lady; she turned her back to the company, and steadying herself by the edge of the boat, sang a yearning little ditty to the sad sea waves, of which not one soul, not even I, who had been sitting next to her, could hear one single word or anything of the tune beyond a faint little pipe, such as one hears when a nervous lady of a certain age starts off in the wrong place during a highly Ritualistic service. I was so interested in the singer, that, when she sat down again, I politely asked her what her exceedingly pretty song was called?

She said that it was called 'Love's Death,' and that she did not know whom it was by, as she had

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never seen the music and only knew it by ear. When we got home I amused myself by writing two little verses to the idea of 'Love's Death,' but as I was not sure whether I might take the title for my own, I altered it in my version to 'Love Died,' and the next day I gave them to a distinguished composer of fashionable and passionate love-ballads, that he might set them to music if he thought them good enough. And here they are :—

LOVE DIED

Love died last night, my little love,
That I had thought to keep for ever ;
I might have saved that tender life
If I had scorned her never.
But I was cold and love was proud,
She fled to wander far and wide ;
And in the frost of an icy look—
Love drooped and died.

Love died last night, my tender love,
Whose sad grey eyes with tears were streaming ;
I heard her cry with plaintive voice,
Or maybe I was dreaming.
I had no word to say, and Love
She slowly turned from me aside ;
And in the fire of an angry thought—
Love drooped and died.

I think the company had heard so little of 'Love's Death,' that the professional harp and fiddle made

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quite a harvest when they sent the hat round after doing their little show. Then the Skipper called for another lady or gentleman to oblige; and a young man, with a very young, ingenuous face, got up and sang a comic song, in the middle of which Phyl whispered in my ear, 'Jack, is that poor young man going to be *very* ill, do you think?'

'Yes, I'm afraid he is,' I replied.

She watched him for a minute or two, and then she turned round eagerly to me, her little face all alight with anxiety. 'Jack, dear,' she said, '*do* you think if I was to lend him my smelling-bottle, it would help him at all?' I told the child that I really did not think that the poor young man needed any *help*, and sure enough, just as the words passed my lips, the comic song came to an abrupt termination as the singer retired as completely as the limited capacities of the small craft would allow. Phyl's big eyes followed him with compassionate superiority. 'Poor young man!' she remarked, 'I would have liked to lend him my smelling-bottle. Perhaps if he had sung a *serous* song he would have got through. But it's so hard to be funny when you've got something there, isn't it, Jack?'

She spread her small hands tenderly out over that portion of her slim little person which is a little below the heart, and she looked so utterly pathetic over the troubles of the poor young man, that I

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burst out laughing, upon which she turned her lovely eyes upon me with such reproach, that I put my arm round her and drew her close to me. 'Phyl, old woman,' I said, 'you're a regular little conscience-clock to me.'

I don't know who pressed the Skipper to sing, or whether he contributed to the general amusement without asking. Anyway, he sang 'They all love Jack' in a voice somewhat the worse for wear. He was, however, vociferously encored, and sang a jolly nautical song, after which he informed us that, as the waiter was in the room, we should oblige by giving our orders now. After this 'the waiter' did quite a brisk trade, and finally we reached land again in safety, which was the very best comfort to some of the passengers, both to those who had held out thus far, and to all of those who had not.

Then one day we drove over to the Devil's Dyke and had tea—a very poor tea at an exceedingly high price, served by a remarkably off-hand young lady, who seemed to think that we had no business there at all. And while the meal was in course of preparation, we went outside and interviewed Mrs. Lee, who was, I believe, in proud possession of the title of Queen of the Gipsies. She told me that I had a beautiful lady for my wife, and that we were worried at having no children. I suggested to her that surely the three youngsters whom we had brought with us were sufficient evidence

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of that particular worry being groundless—but Mrs. Lee would not be taken in.

'Those are not your children, dear gentleman,' she said quickly. 'They may be your dear lady's—I'll tell you that when I've seen her hand.'

Of course I could not go against this, I never was clever enough to be deceitful even in joke, so I had to confess that they were really not my children, and Mrs. Lee went on with her business of telling my fortune. She told me one or two home truths, too, and then, when she got hold of Nell's little soft hand, she remarked, 'I see no children in this hand either.'

Odd, wasn't it? I am not a credulous man, but I begin to wonder whether there is not something in it.

The funniest part of it all was her verdict on Phyl. 'I look into the future,' she said, regarding my Phyl dreamily, 'and I see this little lady sitting in a high position, houses and lands surround her, all her own. There are many servants to do her bidding. She has beautiful dresses and jewels to wear, and a handsome husband to love her always. There is only one cloud in all her happy sky. Only one cloud, little lady. You'll live to ride in your own carriage, my dear.'

Truly, at that moment the child looked lovely enough to adorn any station of life. And I fancy that Mrs. Lee thought so too, for she bent down to Phyl just as we were turning away, and said, 'Little lady, will you kiss me?'

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'ONLY ONE CLOUD, LITTLE LADY'

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We had many pleasures of a simple kind in the gay watering place, including a great Primrose League meeting, at which we had exceedingly bad seats, and heard the very dullest and most prosy speeches that it was ever my misfortune to listen to.

We also gave a small party—we are clever at gathering our friends together, no matter what part of the world we may happen to be in. And we went to the theatre, and the following evening to a music-hall, where we saw a wonderful burlesque on the Lyceum 'Faust,' with a travesty of Mr. Irving as *Mephistopheles*.

But our pleasures were very simple, and although we contrived to spend a great deal of money they were really all very cheap. And really, in a place like Brighton it is surprising that your money goes at all. Yet it does!

For instance, it is a penny, twopence, or threepence to go on the West Pier, and once there, how simple and modest are the amusements which supplement your pleasure! You can go and see 'Daniel in the den of lions' for threepence, and into the camera obscura for a like sum. Then at three o'clock you can see professor somebody dive off the topmost roof of the several huts, stands, or whatever they are at the end of the pier, and for a very small consideration you can see the young lady, who remains all day in a warm tank, go through her several performances.

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You can also buy your paper, your cigarette, or get your hair cut on the pier for precisely the same price that you can in any of the shops in the town—and yet money seems to slip through your fingers like water.

I think in our case it was *extras*.

Well, at the end of our time we went back to Putney, feeling all the better both in minds and bodies for the little change. The little Morrisons were awaiting us anxiously on the door step, and the meeting between them and our youngsters was touching and pathetic to see.

'We've got a new house,' said Marjory, the eldest girl, sorrowfully; 'a house without a garden, Phyl, and they are going to pull the dear Cedars down, or sell them or something. We're so miserable; and they've got a board up in the garden. Oh, you don't know how wretched we are.'

Phyl turned her wondering eyes upon me. 'Are *we* going away from The Cedars, too, Jack?' she asked.

'I'm afraid we've got to,' I answered; no, my dear sir or madam, it was not elegant—I quite admit it—but even novelists get out of harness sometimes, and although I try my level best to write only the purest and simplest English possible when I am really working, I do now and then relax into slip-shod language, even into slang, in the bosom of my family, and as this is not a piece of imaginative work—other-

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wise fiction—but a true and simple chronicle of events which, for the most part, have actually happened, I am, in a manner, bound to repeat exactly what took place, instead of doctoring it up as one does with the little anecdotes and scraps of humour which one's friends expect one to work into one's stories.

I think I can hear the captious critic making severe and caustic remarks about chronicles of small beer. Well, as long as I do not pretend that the small beer is anything but small beer, what matters? Small beer is a very good thing in its way, provided that the one who retails it does not try to palm it off as Imperial Tokay—which, strictly between ourselves, is a remark which might well, and with much advantage to a long-suffering race of readers, be taken to heart by many a one wielding the story-teller's or journalist's pen nowadays. The information imparted by the little Morrisons proved, however, to be too true; and Nell and I found that we could get no renewal of our tenancy of No. 5, The Cedars, and that when our holiday in Essex was over we should have to face the nuisance of a move, the horrors of house-hunting, and the detestable business of making our new abode something more than a house only.

For I found on my study table a notification from the company to which The Cedars belong, that we should have to leave at Michaelmas. 'Oh, it's the devil,' I exclaimed aloud in my disgust.

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'Well, Jack,' Nell remarked, 'I don't altogether know. We should have had to do a lot at the house this autumn, and, really, I should like to live in a nice, new, convenient house a little nearer Town. It's such a weary way home at night, Jack, and you know we feel that dreadfully, both of us.'

There was so much in what she said, and I felt that she had put up with the dilapidated old house so long in deference to my affection for the place, that I could not help catching hold of her then with a hug that was more like that of a bear than anything else.

'My girl,' I said to her, 'I shall get to the end of my work in three or four days, and after that we'll go up to Town, and take a look round the neighbourhood you are most likely to fancy. And you shall have everything that you want most in your new house. Only leave me my den as it is, and all the rest shall be yours, your very own, to do just what you like with.'

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CHAPTER XIV

THE WHITE HOUSE

On Tuesday afternoon I was at work in my room—well, no, I was not actually working at that moment, for I had just written the last word of the story which has been occupying me for several weeks. I was leaning back in my big chair, thanking Heaven that I had come to so easy and so successful a termination, when there came a gentle tap upon the door, and, immediately after, Phyl's little fair face appeared in sight.

'Hallo!' said I.

'Jack, dear,' she answered, 'are you awf'lly busy?'

'My woman,' said I—and I was almost ashamed of the boyish ring of joy in my voice—'*I've done!*'

'Done it all?' she echoed.

'All,' I replied; then added, 'all this lot, that is.'

'And you won't do any more for how long—a week?'

'Perhaps not.'

'And you can come now and do something for us?'

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'Of course! What is it?'

'It's a box, Jack,' she cried. 'And Auntie says it's from darling Mother—she's nearly sure it's from Mother.'

I went into the next room, the dining-room that is to say, and found Nell struggling valiantly with a stout wooden box, upon which she made not the smallest impression.

'Here, let me do that,' I cried hastily.

Nell dropped the hammer instantly. 'I was afraid you were busy, dear,' she remarked, 'and of course we were—are—all dying to see what is in this,' and she promptly, instead of getting up off her knees, subsided into a pretty attitude of expectation on the floor beside the box.

It did not take me very long to prise it open, after which I drew an easy-chair to a good point of vantage from which I could see well, and lighted myself a cigarette the more thoroughly to enjoy the situation.

The first thing to appear was something marked 'For dear old Jack,' and Phyl asked eagerly if she might not be the one to open it?

I gave the requisite permission, and Phyl's busy fingers brought to light a smoking cap so gorgeous that it fairly made me blink to look at it.

While I was wondering what use I should ever be able to put such a thing to, Nell's hands had brought fresh treasure trove to light. It was a wonderful box.

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There were feathers for Phyl, and a set of heavy silver bangles, seven of them all exactly alike, for Nell; a set of wonderful models for my friend Jackie, all made of clay, birds, dogs, cats, bullocks, horses, and donkeys, and half a dozen little figures representing different native men and women.

For little Cis there was a huge Japanese doll, and a dear little silver bangle with a tiny elephant hanging from it. Phyl had also one nearly like it; and Jackie had a chain for his watch, which he always wears, but which he cannot yet tell, although I know Nell has tried her best to teach him.

Nor was this wonderful box without a souvenir for Nanna; for her there was a soft and warm Rampoor Chuddah, and when Nanna found herself enfolded in the warm folds she smirked and looked at herself quite coquettishly in the nearest glass, to my no little amusement.

'The dear misthress, bless her, remimbered me wakeness,' she remarked, changing the coquettish look for a sniff; 'perhaps you'll send me duty and me best thanks when you're afther writin', Ma'am.'

'I will, Nanna, I will,' replied Nell.

Well, the following morning we went up to Earl's Court Station, and started a house-hunting pilgrimage from that point, for Nell had a fancy for trying that neighbourhood. However, we only found two houses that we really liked. One was in the Trebovir Road,

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and was an uncommonly nice house in itself, but the back windows looked out over the glass roof of the station, and Nell, who is a cleanly person with almost a craze for fresh air, did not seem to take to it somehow. The other house was in Nevern Square, and although a trifle small for us, had so many pleasant points about it that we have quite decided to have it, if considerations of rent and fixtures do not bar the way. And the day after that we bade good-bye to good old Putney and came off to Wix, and here I sit writing in the dining-room (turned for the time into my study), while Nell is getting settled, and Jackie in vain tries to climb the monkey-tree just outside my windows.

What a sweet place it is, now that we see it in all the beauty of June verdure and June freshness. I have never seen a place so exactly realising the poet's words—'the leafy month of June'—and as I write now I look up from time to time to prompt my enthusiastic pen and try to give you, dear sir or madam, an idea of the tender and idyllic scene which greets my eyes every time I lift them from the paper.

I scarce know how to find words to describe it, this pretty place, nor can I, I fear, even find words to tell you how these three youngsters, about whom I write, fairly revel in this green isolation of summer loveliness. But I must try! This chronicle is to be read

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IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE IS THE USUAL GARDEN

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by two people far away in India and pining to know what their bairns are doing at any or every hour of the day. So I must try to put upon paper something of the joy which thrills through my heart this fair June morning, to show some of the fair gifts of nature which have given that joy birth.

First, the ivy which fringes the windows reminds me that the front of the house is covered with ivy from the ground to the tops of the windows in the upper story. There is an octagonal glass porch over the door, two windows on each side of it, and five windows in the story above. The dining-room is at the left of the door as you go in, the drawing-room to the right, and out of the latter a door leads into a large conservatory along the roof of which creep a grape vine and a crimson passion flower, whose vivid blossoms hang here and there like blood-red stars suspended by a thread of green some eight inches long. At one end, against the side of the house, there grows a pink geranium which reaches to the roof, and all the centre of the conservatory is occupied by a large sunk tank with a sort of balustrade round it, at the base of which grows a thick border of moss and ice plants. Above it is an erection of shelves, a four-sided plant-stand of four tiers, filled now with blooming plants, and in the water below, which apparently comes from the roof of the house, a few gold fish disport themselves and one melancholy frog

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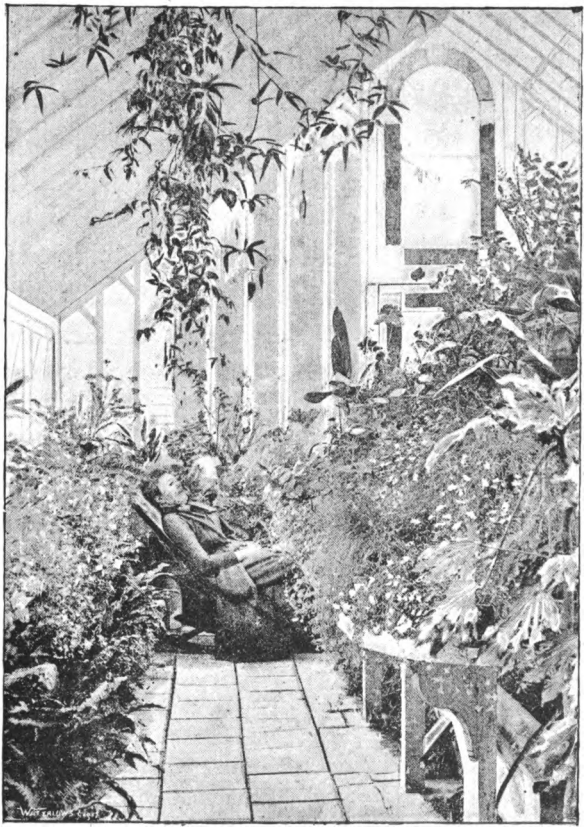
passes what seems to me a dreary existence, partly in swimming about the tank, partly in sitting like



IN THE CONSERVATORY

Diogenes in his tub at the mouth of the pipe through which the supply of water enters the tank.

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But it is the view from the windows of the room in which I write that touches me most deeply. I hardly know why. In front of the house is the usual garden that you find in the country and the usual broad gravelled drive, with a high flower-bed in the centre. This bed lies like a great jewel, and is really worth description. First, a setting of fine velvet-like turf, then an edging of small red drain tiles set up endways, then a broad ring of blue lobelia, at least a foot broad, then a ring of 'Mrs. Pollocks' geraniums, and further back a ring of green-leaved pink ones; behind that again a ring of tiles, then a ring of brilliant yellow calceolarias; behind them again a band of 'Mrs. Pollocks,' and in the very centre of all a large green-leaved red-flowered geranium, which is so large and strong that it seems like a small tree.

In all this mass of brilliant bloom you cannot see a speck of the brown earth anywhere, indeed it is only by peering very closely in among the geraniums that you can see that there is a second row of tiles. On either hand you go across the broad drive and step on the thickest and softest of green turf, which in turn is bordered by handsome shrubs, evergreens and tall trees. I do not think I ever saw a small garden so full of bloom as this one. There are rose-trees in a row, each one a mass of bright colour and full of sweet odours, there are brilliant patches of lobelia here and there fringing the turf, beds of

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mignonette, great clumps of carnations and clove pinks, an archway of trellis-work which is a mass of honeysuckle, clematis, Banksia roses, and the pure white York roses which have played such an important part in English history. And there is a large bed to one side of the house, a compromise between a flower-bed and a rockery, in which quaint flowers rise tier above tier until they are lost in the bright green of huge hart's-tongue ferns, and those again are lost in the brighter tints of an evergreen hedge which completely hides the wall which stands just behind it.

I never saw such a garden. Everywhere under the ferns and in all the borders that are not filled with temporary plants like geraniums and calceolarias, there are violet plants and lilies of the valley growing. In the early spring the whole place must be fragrant with sweet-smelling blossoms, to say nothing of the many-tinted crocus and the ever-lovely snowdrop; and the gardener David (who, from what I can make out, has been gardener here for ever) tells me that the present beauty of bloom will be replaced or supplemented later on by all manner of stocks and asters, by Christmas roses and single dahlias of all colours, and by that universal favourite, the heliotrope, and later still, by the pure chaste beauty of the white chrysanthemum, or, as the old man calls it, the 'chrissyanthum.'

But although the beauties of the flower garden

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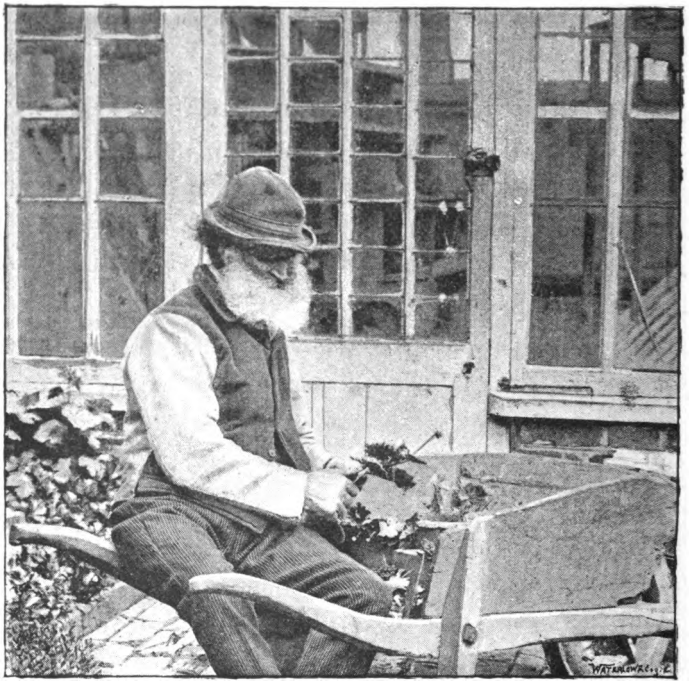
delight my senses and soothe my nerves, I think it is the meadow on the other side of the fence that really fills me most with pleasure. I said fence, but in truth the garden is divided from the meadow



DAVID, THE GARDENER

half by a fence and half by a closely-clipt hedge. And that meadow—*oh!* that meadow!

Yet as meadows go there is nothing so very wonderful or remarkable about it. It is not more than

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fifty years old at the outside, and that, you know, is quite young for a meadow. For a meadow to pride itself on being a meadow it should be at least a hundred years old, yes, it should have been at least a hundred years without having once felt the deep wounding score of the plough.

When I am in the country I so often think of Whyte Melville's sad sweet words:

It never can bloom any more, love,
For the plough hath passed over the spot,
And the furrow hath left its score, love,
In the place where the flowers are not.

Somehow I never see the plough at work without thinking of them, and I never find myself tramping through a meadow, ankle deep among the grass and the daisies, without thinking of Whyte Melville and all the fresh and breezy, wholesome, *living* books that he wrote, and of the perfect little tender poems that came from that brilliant pen. My Nell sings that song, and Phyl, who has the sweetest little pipe in the world excepting, perhaps, the elder of the two Naudin sisters, has picked it up from her, and, indeed, is singing it at this moment somewhere out in the garden:

I thought it would last for a life, love,
But it went with the winter snow.

Dear, dear! 'tis an odd thing to hear that tender child's pipe lilting out a heartbroken love song. Even

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as I listen and write, she has changed her song—the song, but not her mood!—

> Hush! A voice from the far away,
> 'Listen and learn!' it seems to say,
> 'All the to-morrows shall be as to-day.'
>
> The cord is frayed—the cruse is dry,
> The link must break, and the lamp must die. . . .
> Good-bye to hope, good-bye, good-bye.

And that is Whyte Melville's also—Tosti's too. I wonder did ever a composer interpret a poet so perfectly as Tosti has interpreted Whyte Melville; and did ever a singer interpret music and words so perfectly as Grace Damian does in that particular song 'Good-bye.' What! you never heard Grace Damian sing it? Then Heaven help you to that delight before long, that is all I can say.

But stay! where am I going? I started out at the beginning of this yarn to tell a story about other people's children—I have drifted into something which might with truth be called 'the idle thoughts of an idle fellow'—and I have absolutely *nothing* to offer by way of excuse excepting that I have got away into the heart of the country, with the lovely undulating Essex scenery around me and the salt sea air blowing over the marshes and mingling with the hundred fragrant scents of the garden.

And yet is it not excuse enough? For the time I

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am drunk with fresh air and the delight of freedom. From hour to hour I curse and revile (politely, of course) that I ever undertook to let Nannie Dare and you know exactly what happens in our daily life. But having undertaken the tale, I am not one to lay it down—only you must forgive my rhapsodies about these country charms just as I hope you forgave me my early raptures about the children's eyes.

Even now I have not described that meadow—the way it slopes down to the highway, the high hedges on either side, white now with the bloom on the bramble bushes, or tinged here and there with the pink stars of the wild roses—the way the tall poplars stand like sentinels at intervals all down the hedges, and like a party relieving guard in a clump at one corner down by the road—the way that the rats scurry in and out of their holes in the banks of the strip of water, something better than a mere pond, at the very bottom of the meadow—the way the water-hens come out upon the carriage road and preen themselves there in the early evening.

Nor have I mentioned the tennis ground which lies just over the fence, and is protected by 'hardles' from the sleek cows and bonny wee calves which inhabit half of the meadow just now. Well, well, I have made a sad hash of this week's portion—I can only hope that my readers and Nannie Dare will alike forgive me and have patience with me just a little longer.

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CHAPTER XV

RUNNING WILD

We have now been ten days at Wix, and already we call it *dear* Wix! I am still drunk with the fresh air and the quiet beauty of the place. I remember when the —th Hussars came back from India in 187–, that for the first two or three weeks the whole of the road between the town of —— and the Cavalry Barracks was, so to speak, bestrewn with helplessly drunken soldiers, soldiers in all stages of drunkenness. The officers passed to and fro, apparently without noticing what was going on under their eyes, and the highly respectable townspeople, who had been used to see a picket despatched with hot haste at the mere hint of a drunken soldier, were properly scandalised at the new state of affairs and wondered disdainfully how they would manage to endure the presence of the —th among them until a merciful Government should be pleased to remove them.

And at last, in sheer exasperation, the question was put to one of the officers—How could they be so wanting in discipline as to permit this state of things?

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'Well, you see,' this man replied, 'most of these poor chaps haven't *tasted* beer for eleven or twelve years, and there's literally nothing for it but to let them drink their fill while their money lasts. They're getting through it as fast as they can,' he added apologetically.

And sure enough, after a few weeks the regiment settled down once more to the usual demeanour of a well-conducted regiment and became quite popular with the highly respectable citizens.

Well, I am like that! I have been drunk on fresh air for ten days and I do not, as yet, see any signs that I am getting over it. Perhaps that is a good thing.

And the children—oh! how those children revel in the place, how they eat, how they drink, how they get up betimes in the morning, and scream, and laugh, and shriek, and romp all over the house and garden, until I feel perfectly limp and jaded and dizzy with the exuberance of their energy.

They had not been here three days before they had all made friends with Carrington, the shepherd—for did I tell you that the White House land is farmed by the owner thereof, and that the Lovedays get all the pleasures of farm-life close at hand without any of the responsibility and trouble of the same—and one fine morning, if you please, I encountered my friend Jackie, mounted on high between the collar

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and the saddle of the fodder-horse, his little hands holding fast the tall wooden hames which stand out from the collar.

BETWEEN THE COLLAR AND THE SADDLE

'Hallo, young man,' said I, 'where may you be off to?'

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'Ah! Jack,' he answered airily. 'We're going up the clover-field to fetch the fodder.'

'Indeed,' said I; then turned to the shepherd, 'Won't he be an awful trouble to you, Carrington?'

'Not a bit, Sir, he be wonderful good company,' the old man said.

I fully agreed with that, and Nell, who had followed me out, asked him where his sisters were?

'They've gone in the turmut-house with George,' Jackie answered promptly.

'*What*!' cried Nell.

Jackie had the grace to blush. 'Well, I mean the turnip-house, Auntie,' he explained; 'but you know they do call them "turmuts" here.'

Carrington began to give signs of wishing to get on—'Now, little Master, hold tight,' he said, warningly, and away they went, the golden-haired, angel-eyed little lad in his blue sailor suit and long man-o'-war's-man's trousers, holding valiantly on, his slight figure swaying to and fro with every movement of the large carthorse. As they got out of earshot, Nell turned and looked at me, her eyes filled with comic dismay—'Turmuts!' she repeated. 'If we graft a flavour of Essex and a dash of Cockney on the top of Nurse's full-bodied Irish accent, what *will* Nannie say when she comes back?'

I laughed outright. 'Oh! Nannie won't say any-

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thing, don't worry yourself about that. Come for a drive with me.'

'I should like it—but about the children? Nanna isn't very well to-day; couldn't we take them or some of them?'

'They'll be happier here. Send Elizabeth or Parker out to look to them,' I suggested.

'Well—but I'll just find out what Phyl and Cis are after. Where did Jackie say they were?'

'In the turmut-house,' I replied solemnly.

'Yes, I know,' laughing, 'but where is the turmut-house?'

'Oh! round here, this way. By the bye, what about George?' I asked, for George was a new quantity to me.

'Oh! Mr. Dunn told me that George was the best boy on the farm, that I might safely trust the children with him any time,' she replied. 'He is the shepherd's boy, you know. Oh! here you are. Well, what are you after, you two?'

Phyl turned round in her frank, emphatic fashion. 'Auntie darling, we're having a gorgeous time,' she announced; 'first we are going to see the bullocks fed, then we are going to see the pigs fed, then we are going to see George break up the cake for the sheep and—and several other things.'

'And you're sure it's quite safe, George?' my wife asked anxiously.

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'Yes'm,' he replied unhesitatingly.

'And they won't be a great trouble to you?'

'No'm.'

'Then,' said Nell, feeling in her pocket and bringing forth a sixpence, 'I will give you that for yourself.'

The boy, who was short and fair, with an honest freckled face, rather coloured as he saw what was in Nell's hand. 'I'd rather not take no money, 'm,' he said quietly. Nell put her hand back in her pocket instantly. 'If you would like them to give you a cup of tea when the little girls go in,' she began, at which he brightened up at once and said that he should like it very much.

'It's quite a comfort,' remarked Nell, as we went towards the stables, 'to be able to hit on something to give such a nice out-spoken boy pleasure.'

And then we went out for our drive among the pleasant leafy lanes, whence we returned to be confronted by the indignant Parker, who informed us that she had never been expected to serve tea to a person of that sort before, and sniffed a sniff which expressed several volumes of ill-usage and disgust.

Nell looked at her with wondering eyes. 'Why, Parker,' she remarked mildly, 'you serve tea to yourself every day, don't you?'

A less capable woman might not have understood —Parker did, however, and with another indignant

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sniff she took herself away with as much of a flounce as she dared indulge in.

'Poor Parker!' said Nell with a smile, 'she has never been the same since the children came to us—and I raised their wages all round,' she added, with gentle reproach.

We found the three children in the little drawing-room, having just finished their tea-supper and come in for the last hour's chat by the fire, which we still find necessary in the evenings, in this sharp fresh air; they were talking about Nannie and Bob.

'I don't think that Mother ever did that,' Phyl was saying, with an air of superior information.

'Yes, Mother did,' said Jackie.

'Who told you so?'

'My darling Mother told me so.' He often speaks of Nannie in the words of that memorable epitaph, '*To the loving memory of my darling mother, who was dround at sea.*'

'I never heard her tell you, Jackie,' said Phyl, still doubting. 'I don't believe she ever did tell you, really I don't.'

'Well, I ought to know,' replied Jackie sturdily; 'she's my mother, and I ought to know better 'n you what she told me.'

Phyl drew herself up indignantly, and flashed quite a fiery glance at Jackie, who was gazing with soft and lovely eyes into the heart of the fire. 'You

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seem to forget, Jackie,' she remarked in a tone of severe reproach, 'that it's *my* mother as well as yours.

'MY MOTHER AS WELL AS YOURS'

'But she *is* my mother,' persisted Jackie.

'My mother as well as yours,' said Phyl, with

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awful distinctness; 'and she was my mother before she was yours, Jackie,' she added triumphantly, 'my mother *before* she was yours.'

There was no getting over that same, and Jackie took refuge in the fact that I was audibly sniggering over Phyl's very trenchant remarks, and immediately set up a laugh, long and loud and clear. Then little Cis looked up in mild and sweet surprise, surprise touched also with apprehension. 'But isn't she all our mothers?' she asked piteously, and Nell ceased her laughter, and caught her to her heart with a stifled cry.

'Yes, my dearest,' she told her; 'she is all of your very own mothers—your very own mothers, darling,' and so the small storm passed over.

Still I must say Phyl's remarks touched me deeply, for they were the expression of a feeling which must rise in the heart of many and many a child who reigns an absolute monarch over all within a certain sphere for several years, and then suddenly finds herself, if not supplanted, at least made equal to a squalling, red-faced atom of humanity, which she must not touch, which cannot talk, or walk, or play, or apparently do anything but squall and open an insatiate maw for such a huge share of that mother-love which had been all hers until that very unsatisfactory rival came on the field. Phyl expressed it all in her indignant reminder, 'Remember, she was my

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mother *before* she was yours.' I must say that I sympathised entirely with Phyl at that moment.

Yesterday we all went off to Dovercourt, or, more truly, into Harwich for the day—such a day! Business first and pleasure after, Nell said; so we four wandered in and out of the quaint little lanes—you cannot with truth call the Harwich ways *streets*—in her wake. I bought a pound of gum jujubes on our way, a mug with 'A present from Harwich' on it for Phyl, and a doll for Cis, without exception the most goggle-eyed doll I ever beheld. It was a flaunting gaudy sort of doll, too, with tawdry lace set on cheap muslin the colour of a blue-bag, and a bonnet—ye gods! what a bonnet! I was ashamed to be seen in the street with her. We christened her 'Miss Jane Bond' on the spot. You know the allusion, perhaps, my dear Sir or Madam? No! Then out of what book did your illustrious self learn to read, I wonder? I quite thought that all the youth previous to this generation learned to read and spell out of a little book which rejoiced in the name of 'Mavor's Spelling Book!' How well I remember it and the highly instructive little reading lessons that it contained. As well as I can remember, this is one:—

'Miss Jane Bond had a new doll, and her kind aunt who gave it her gave her a fine piece of cloth to make a shift for it. She gave her also a pair of stays and a long lace with a tag to it, some pretty blue

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gauze to make doll a frock, and a broad white sash. But Miss Jane had no thread, and therefore she could not make all these fine clothes. So her kind aunt gave her also some thread, and Miss Jane set to work and very soon doll was quite smart.' I am without information on the subject, but I cannot help fancying that the renowned and presumably defunct Mavor was a man and that he was not married. A woman would have gone more elaborately into the question of clothing, and a married man would assuredly have known better than to make it of such exceedingly limited dimensions.

How very odd a feeling it is to look back to the days when we were little people ourselves, to think of the bitter tears we shed over 'Miss Jane Bond' and the like, over those horrible columns of spelling which somehow made you long to get out into the garden or the fields, according to your situation in life—your local situation, I mean. Those dreadful stacks of meaningless words :

Dog	Pig
Cat	Rat

Or, a little further on—

Elbow	Candle
Table	Tender

Or worse still—

Carriage	President
Illumine	Separate

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I suppose spelling *is* a good thing; I am not very clever at it yet, and I suffered tortures in my juvenile days trying to remember such words as 'El-bow' and 'Ill-u-mine!' I remember once, in my first school, being turned back for not spelling 'separate' properly. I had spelt it 'sep*e*rate.' The second time I took it up as 'sep*p*erate'; and, indeed, even with the help of the dictionary, I must have gone up and been turned back at least twenty times. It stood like this: 'Sep*e*rate—Sep*pe*rate—Sep*u*rate—Sep*pa*rate—Sep*pu*rate—Sep*i*rate—Sep*ereat*.' At last I tried 'separate,' not because I thought it would be right, but out of sheer desperation as a new combination of letters which I thought I might as well try. It did prove right, and then my teacher said: 'Now, since it has taken you so long, take your slate and write it out fifty times, and then perhaps you'll remember it.' How I hated that governess, to be sure! I believe I should hate her now if I were to meet her. Afterwards I certainly did not forget how to spell separate, but I could not understand why desperate was not spelt desp*a*rate—indeed I did spell it so until I was a grown man; I'm not quite sure whether I do not sometimes spell it so now.

I do not know how they teach small children to spell now, but if I have any say in the matter of Nannie Dare's youngsters receiving their first instructions, I shall vote against columns of meaningless

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words, and vote for their learning to spell a little story or anecdote right through, big words and little words alike. For instance, why should not a small child learn to repeat a little story or poem, and then learn to spell each word as it comes? Surely it is more reasonable to expect a child to understand:

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
Oh, I wonder what you are!
Up above me, oh, so high,
Like a diamond in the sky,

than to expect that child to fix in its mind the four most difficult words in the simple verse thus:

Twinkle	Little
Wonder	Diamond

By the bye, speaking of stars reminds me that last night when we were coming back from Dovercourt (a little late, for the night was drawing in, and Nell was nervous about Cis), Phyl suddenly observed, 'There are only three flowers in the sky to-night. Last night it was full of flowers.'

'I wonder,' said Jackie, 'whether there are any stars in India?'

'Why, yes, my boy, they have these stars—just the same that we have.'

He stared at me a moment. 'What, do they travel round?' he asked.

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'Yes,' I answered, 'at least—well, yes—yes.' I felt that it was no use explaining exactly how the earth and the stars worked, that it would take me all night, and that even then I should probably not make him understand.

'And how soon will they get them?'

'To-morrow,' I replied.

'To-morrow! What, to-morrow as ever is?' he demanded. 'But I thought you said it took a month to get to India?'

'But the stars manage it in half a day,' I replied.

He was silent for a moment, then he burst out: 'What a pity they don't hook us on to the stars, then we could go every day if we liked.'

'Hitch your waggon to a star,' quoted Nell, softly.

'But you must go the way the star goes,' I continued.

Jackie looked up. 'Dear stars,' he said, sweetly, 'I kiss my hand to you—you will see my darling mother to-morrow, and she will see you too.'

'But she won't know that you kissed your hand to them, Jackie,' said Phyl, in a womanly tone.

'No, perhaps not,' doubtfully; then in a joyous voice, 'but I shall know, Phyl,' he cried—'I shall know!'

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CHAPTER XVI

TWINGES

My wife and I are both plagued in the same way—we both have a tendency towards fat and an inclination towards rheumatism. When I say a tendency towards fat, I do not mean to convey that we weigh respectively eighteen and twenty stones, or that we have to have chairs specially constructed for us, or that we draw forth stinging and sarcastic remarks from our fellow-creatures if we happen to get into an omnibus. Not at all; yet each of us could well give a stone of our weight to some of our more angular friends, and so far from looking and feeling the worse for the transaction, I am sure we should both look and feel all the better for it. Nell, however, goes even further than that; she would like to get rid of two stones of what she is pleased to call her 'superfluous adipose tissue,' and hankers dreadfully after the slim and willowy figure of her girlhood.

'I really don't mind getting a bit fat, Jack,' she explains plaintively to me at times; 'indeed I think I rather like well covered people better than real thin

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ones, but it's the elderly spread I hate so—the elderly spread.' Well, in view of attaining a little nearer to our former slim elegance, we went in violently for tennis as soon as we found ourselves at Wix, and gave all our spare time to the game with an energy worthy of a nobler cause, and I am sure if our friends in London could have an opportunity of seeing us flying hither and thither after the fast and wily balls they would be properly astonished. And, by the bye, that reminds me that one day last week Phyl had a misfortune. She was wheeling Cis in a small doll's bassinette perambulator, and while going across the wide sweep of gravel which lies between the side door and the stables, she caught her foot and fell heavily, the 'pram' tipping up and Miss Cis falling backwards with her weight on to Phyl's hands, which were still tightly grasping the handle of the little carriage.

Her piercing shrieks brought every member of the household running to the large stone-floored hall which divides the entrance hall from the kitchens, and which is called 'the house room.' Nell was the first to reach the child, whose poor hands presented a terrible sight. 'My darling, my darling,' she said as she caught Phyl to her bosom.

Poor damaged little Phyl did not stop her piteous shrieks, although she continued to ejaculate a few remarks between each fresh burst of sobs and screams.

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'Oh, Auntie—Auntie, I have hurt myself,' she sobbed.

'Yes, my dearest, I know you have,' cried Nell rocking her to and fro; 'but Nanna will bring some hot water——'

'No, not *hot*,' cried Phyl, 'not hot, Auntie; indeed I can't bear *hot* water near my fingers, I can't, Auntie.'

'I meant warm,' said Nell, correcting herself; 'I mean *just* warm, darling, to get the gravel and dirt out before we tie them up.'

'Now, me lamb,' said Nanna then, having in a trice got a basin of warm water and a soft sponge, 'now, me lamb, be bould now and put your poor fingers right in; 'twill aise 'em, me darlin', 'twill aise 'em better than anythin'.'

'Dr. Murray isn't here,' sobbed Phyl piteously, and truly if the child had happened a serious accident in the heart of Stanley's darkest Africa and no surgeon was within a hundred miles of her, her tone could not have expressed a greater degree of desolation.

'But if he were, he would put them into water the first thing,' urged Nell.

'You think he would?'

'I'm sure of it, dear. Now be brave, darling, plunge them right in it,' she urged.

Thus persuaded, Phyl cautiously dipped her maimed fingers into the warm water, and finding

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relief after the first plunge resisted no further, but lay back against Nell's shoulder while the old nurse carefully and gently sponged the wounds. And wounds, regular wounds, they were, for five of the poor child's fingers were skinned from the nail to the middle knuckle, two of them cut to the very bone.

We got them as clean as we could, Nanna and I, and then I dressed them with strips of lint spread with cold cream and wound them up in strips of plain lint, sewing each finger bandage up neatly and separately. She was very good, that child, very full of the importance of a serious accident, and very full of commiseration for herself.

'Does Jim know I have hurt myself?' she demanded suddenly, while Nanna was still busy with the sponge and the water. Jim, I may tell you, is the groom, a special friend of the children. Jim was promptly sent for. He came a moment later, looking a bit scared by the sight of the child's bleeding fingers. 'Jim,' said Phyl—she was still sobbing and crying—'Jim, I've hurt myself dreadfully—I've broken all my fingers—all my fingers. Look at them.'

She held them tragically out over the basin, and Jim shifted his position from one leg to the other with several expressions of sympathy—'Tckt-tckt-tckt!'

'Are you sorry, Jim?' she demanded.

'Yes, Miss Phyl, I am,' he answered sturdily, and his tone was genuine enough to satisfy even her.

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'I'VE BROKEN ALL MY FINGERS'

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'Oh! it's dreadful, it's dreadful,' Phyl went on, still sobbing; 'it's hurting me, Nanna. Oh! if my friends in London knew, they would be sorry for me —they would be sorry for me, Nell, they would indeed.'

'Oh! my dear, they would be sorry!' Nell cried holding her close to her sympathetic heart, 'as sorry as we all are.'

'And you are sorry, Auntie?' said Phyl, holding her breath in a gasp as Nanna let the water trickle over the worst finger. 'I can't help crying, Auntie, I can't indeed.'

'Oh! my darling, we are all sorry, we're *so* sorry—I am almost crying, I'm so sorry,' Nell assured her.

Phyl, however, showed that she liked best the assurance of her own eyes, for she ceased her sobs and sat upright, turning sharply round to look in Nell's face. 'Are you?' she asked quickly; then in a satisfied tone, added, 'Yes, you are sorry for me, dear Auntie.'

I was as grieved for the dear child as well could be, but I must admit that at that moment a convulsion took place within me which would have offended Phyl for ever if she had perceived it. But she did not; on the contrary her busy little brain was occupied with quite another matter. 'You won't be able to work any more to-day, Jack,' she remarked.

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'No, my woman, that's quite true,' I replied.

'I needn't have made such a row,' she went on, 'it's babyish, but I really couldn't help it, Auntie dear, I really couldn't, it allieves me.'

'Yes, darling, we know, we know,' murmured Nell in her most soothing accents.

'Cis has never been near me,' was Phyl's next comment.

'Poor Cis is nearly frightened out of her senses,' Nell told her; 'but she is here waiting to see how bad the damage is, aren't you, Cis?'

'Yes, Auntie,' said Cis, in a scared little voice.

Phyl sat up and eyed her. 'I don't believe Cis is a little bit sorry for me,' she burst out.

'Oh! Phyl, dear, Cis is dreadfully sorry,' cried Nell, 'are you not, Cis?'

'Yes,' piped Cis.

'Well,' was Phyl's uncompromising reply, 'you don't look a bit sorry—*you look as if you rather enjoyed it!*'

After this, however, she was carried upstairs and laid on Nell's bed for half an hour; and for the rest of the week that poor little soul's fingers had to be dressed night and morning, during the whole of which time she was as plucky as possible, never wincing once, though the process must have given her considerable pain. And even now she still has four of

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her fingers bandaged up, and is likely to have them so for a week or more to come.

Well, to go back to our tennis and our tendencies to fat and rheumatism, I was saying that we played hard at the one, Nell and I, with a view of getting rid of adipose tissue, and, to a certain extent, we succeeded; but for the rheumatism, well! I know not whether it is the heavy dews which lie on the grass in the morning, or the equally heavy dews which rise in the late afternoon, or the damp striking through the meagre protection of tennis shoes, but I must confess that I have never experienced such rheumatic twinges as have racked my unfortunate legs during the past week. And three days ago, when I awoke in the morning, I said to Nell, 'My dear child, the beastly screws have got into my back and shoulders, and if I don't look out I shall be properly fixed up for the whole winter.'

She looked at me with her dear eyes filled with dismay.

'Oh! Jack,' she cried, 'I was afraid this was what giving up Homburg would mean.'

'Oh! well, don't worry about it,' I replied. 'We'll run up to Town for the day and see Fitzalan Smith, and if he advises Homburg, we'll just slip off there at once without losing a day.'

Fitzalan Smith is a medical specialist who has had my rheumatism in hand for the last fifteen years.

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'And you would leave the children here?' Nell asked.

'Yes, they'll be safe enough with Nanna,' I answered.

So that morning we went off on our little jaunt to London, promising ourselves a dinner in Town and a theatre after it. I went and saw Fitzalan Smith, who told me that I ought to have had more sense than to think an exchange of Homburg for the Essex marshes could possibly work well; and that the sooner I got off to the pleasant little German Spa the better for everybody concerned.

I assured Fitzalan Smith that what he was pleased to call 'the Essex marshes' was not a series of swamps and morasses, but that the country between Harwich and Colchester is rich and undulating, even hilly; all to no purpose, however. 'My dear fellow,' he said at last, 'that part of Essex which lies between Harwich and Colchester may be a slice out of Paradise, I don't attempt to deny it for a moment, but be that as it may, certain it is that you have not had a rheumatic attack so bad as this for years, and to Homburg you will have to go and take the full course both of baths and waters.'

'All right,' I said, and though I was sorry in one way, yet I wasn't in another.

We went back to Putney and dressed, and then we went off to Town and got some dinner. I am

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almost afraid to say where, lest some critic falls upon me tooth and nail and regularly flays me for my supposed ignorance of my London. I once wrote a little story called 'Dinna Forget,' and I had occasion to make the hero take his *fiancée* and a favoured old servant of hers to dine somewhere within reach of Morley's Hotel the evening before he was to be married. I chose Simpson's as being a likely sort of place for a quiet little dinner of that kind. I was immediately called over the coals by the clever critic of a small and obscure paper, who proceeded gravely to inform the public and me that I was mistaken in thinking Simpson's a *smart* place at which to dine.

Until that moment I did not know that I had intended to convey that Simpson's was smart, or that an army man would be likely to take a worthy old country servant to dine at a so-called *smart* place; and I—and I think I know my London fairly well—have yet to learn that it is a 'smart' thing to dine at a restaurant at all. I may be old-fashioned, of course, and probably not likely to know the ways of smart people so well as the good lady or gentleman who writes book notices for a small journal of no particular standing—I forget the name of it, and most of my belongings are in Town, so that I cannot refer back to my notice book—but it seems to me that the really *smart* way to entertain is to do it in your own house, with your own knives and forks,

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your own servants to wait, and your own cook to cook the dinner or supper, as the case may be.

I have dined in most places in London town excepting the Savoy Hotel, and my idea is that after all, if you go to a restaurant, you find a restaurant, whichever you choose—as a rule, knives and forks such as you would not use in your own house, damp table-napkins, an absence of table decoration of every kind, a more or less indifferent waiter, and over all a horrible, hot, greasy, overpowering smell of dinner. No, no, I fail to see where the smartness of a restaurant dinner comes in, while for a good, wholesome, well-cooked, unpretending dinner, commend me to Simpson's, which is near the theatres, and has the best-mannered head-waiter of my acquaintance.

However, we didn't go to Simpson's that night; we went elsewhere, where we foregathered with my esteemed friend 'Momus,' who gave us all the news and a perfectly new story about a great sculptor and a model, which I recommended him to save for 'The Gentlewoman.' 'And how is my friend Phyllis?' he asked when we had nearly finished dinner.

'Smashed five of her fingers.'

'Lord bless me! I'm sorry. Tell her I love her dearly and that she's to get her fingers well before I see her again. By the bye, are you going to Homburg this year?'

'Yes, I'm up now to see Fitzalan Smith,' I

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answered. 'I quite thought I was going to skip Homburg this year, but my rheumatism and Fitzalan Smith say no, and we are off at once.'

'I see. Well, I hope you'll have a good time. If you chance to see me there, you needn't be surprised.'

We parted after dinner, he going his way and we ours to a theatre—I won't say what theatre, lest I be told it was not a smart thing to go to it. And the next day we went back to Wix, laden with sweeties for the youngsters, and carrying the news of our approaching trip abroad.

And yesterday morning the doctor here came in a casual sort of way: 'Going to Homburg?' he said. 'Ah! I wish I could. You'd better take Phyl with you and give her a course of those pine baths.'

'Do you mean it?' I asked.

'Mean it—of course I do!'

'But why?' I exclaimed, for my heart went down to my boots; it seemed such an ominous order for a child of six.

'Why? Well, she's too tall, and she is looking weedy and pale. If it doesn't make *much* difference to you, it would be the best thing in the world for her.'

'Then she shall go,' I said promptly, and Nell slipped her hand under my arm and squeezed it hard. I knew what she meant; and on Saturday we three

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are going off to Homburg, leaving Nanna and the twins in charge of the White House.

I wondered why the doctor had not wished us to take Cis; but it is true, she is getting rosy and strong and eats like a ploughboy!

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CHAPTER XVII

OFF TO HOMBURG

THE day before we left for Homburg, two of the little Morrisons arrived on a visit to Nanna and the twins. They are nice, wholesome sort of children, the little Morrisons, *not too good*. I may be wrong, but I don't like *very* good children, there is something uncanny about them, and they are like *very* good people, you never quite know where to have them.

As I said, the little Morrisons are thoroughly wholesome, and have a very proper love of dirt. Really it isn't natural for children to like that state which looks as if it had just come out of a bandbox—no truly nice children ever do. They are older than our twins; Mab is seven, and Dick is five and a half, but they are devoted friends, and pleasant, frank, hearty sort of bairns, whom it is a pleasure to give a pleasure to.

They arrived at Wrabness—our station—travelling in charge of the guard, by the two o'clock train, and were seized upon by our youngsters before I had time to see after their luggage.

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THEY ARRIVED AT WRABNESS

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'Oh!' cried Dick, 'you've got a carriage.'

'A carriage,' echoed Jackie, 'why of course we've got a carriage; it's three miles to the White House. You couldn't walk three miles.'

'Yes, I once did,' answered Dick, sturdily; 'but I'd rather not—I'd rather have a carriage by a long way. Is it pretty, the White House?' he inquired, as we turned away from the station.

Phyl turned her sweet eyes upon him. 'It's lovely!' she said rapturously, 'and we are quite sorry to be going to Homburg, aren't we, Jack?'

'H'm—well, in a sense we are,' I answered.

Phyl is very quick of understanding; that child guessed in a moment that she had not said quite the right thing in saying we were sorry to be going to Homburg, and she turned the conversation in the most adroit manner possible. 'I should think, Dick,' she remarked with a certain amount of severity, 'that you'll be quite glad to get your face washed; it's *so* dirty.'

'Oh! Dick didn't wash his face this morning, I don't believe,' remarked Mab, who was sitting beside me in the post of honour. 'Did you, Dick?'

Dick reddened a little—and let me tell you his face *was* dirty—'Oh! well,' he said uneasily, 'my—my sponge was packed up, you know.'

I positively roared at the boy's ingenuous honesty, for Mab's remarks had been unmistakably uttered in

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a spirit of the purest chaff. Mab, however, girl-like, followed up her advantage.

'I don't believe you brushed your teeth either, this morning.'

'Oh! my toothbrush was packed up too,' pleaded Dick.

'Ah!' remarked Mab, turning back with an air of a victor, 'then I dare say that's why you never said your prayers—they were packed up of course.'

I am bound to say that we all shrieked, and nobody laughed so heartily at the joke as Master Dick himself.

How those youngsters did enjoy themselves that day, to be sure; it made me feel light-hearted and young to see it. But there was just a shade of superiority in the tone our youngsters took to their little guests. You see they had been some weeks in the country, and their inquisitive minds had been greedily open all the time, and literally thirsting for information; moreover, all their lives had been passed in an atmosphere of change, and of quickly getting used to settling down in new quarters. The young Morrisons, on the contrary, were town children, and, indeed, had never lived more in the country than Putney in their lives.

'Look! there's a rat running across the path,' cried Phyl: but both Mab and Dick missed it, not being used to catching a mere glimpse of passing objects.

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Now I did not think this a particularly pleasant trait to encourage in them, so with a view of taking Miss Phyl down a peg, I pointed to a field which we were passing in our search for flowers during the afternoon, and said, 'You don't know what those are, do you, Phyl?'

I quite thought I had put a regular poser to her, but Phyl cast her radiant eyes over the field and answered me in the sweetest tones imaginable, 'Oh! they're half turnips, and half mangolds. I believe,' she added, 'that they're yellow mangolds, but I'm not quite sure about that.'

It is remarkable, but if ever I try to do my duty and shove a moral in, so to speak, those children always contrive to make me feel like a fool, and wish that I had held my tongue. I made no more remarks that day with a view of taking Phyl down a peg, in fact I let agricultural questions severely alone, duty or no duty, moral or no moral.

And on Saturday evening we bade a fond farewell to Nanna and the four youngsters, with certain strict injunctions not to go near the fodder horse unless Carrington or George was there to look after them, to avoid the ponds, and take care they did not get too near to the pigs (I have an unconquerable loathing of live pigs) and the bullocks, and then we drove off to Parkeston, whence the boats start for Rotterdam and Antwerp.

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We had chosen the Antwerp route, I hardly know why, except that Nell prefers it, and had made up her mind to stay the night at Brussels. I will draw a veil over the horrors of the voyage—it is always allowable to call a twelve hours' passage a voyage when one is a bad sailor. Not that I am; I saw Nell and the child safely down to their cabin, and then I went and got a good supper, and afterwards went on deck with my pipe and foregathered with a very agreeable fellow, who was going to Kreuznach to see his wife, who was there for a long cure.

We had a long and exceedingly interesting chat on various subjects, and then when at last it got too cold to be comfortable, I went below and had a whisky and soda, after which I turned in, and slept the sleep of the just until daytime. I was dressed in next to no time, having young Dick Morrison in my mind all the time, and then I went to inquire for my ladies. I met the portly stewardess at the top of the stairs leading to the ladies' quarters—'Do you happen to be Mr. Winter?' she asked me.

'Yes, Madam, I am,' I replied; 'I was just coming to see how my ladies have got on.'

'Your lady haven't got on at all,' she said promptly. 'She have been wonderful bad all night. But the little lady, though she have been werry ill, too' (she was an Essex woman, unmistakably) 'have

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picked up a bit, and she is dressed and ready to come up on deck and get a bit of breakfast.'

'Has my wife been very ill?' I asked.

'Werry ill, indeed,' returned the good lady promptly.

All this had come of choosing the longest route, which we had never done before. I made up my mind on the spot that we would make the return journey by Ostend and Dover, or by Calais and Dover, if Nell wishes. But Nell detests the Calais-Dover route, and never chooses it by any chance if she can help it.

'I suppose I couldn't see her for a minute?' I suggested.

She looked doubtful, and I slipped a half-crown into her hand, at which her face cleared somewhat. 'I don't know that I ought to let you down, sir,' she said, 'but do you stay there a minute while I ask the ladies. They're wonderful kind mostly, when anyone have been werry ill.'

She turned and went nimbly down the narrow twisted stair, leaving me where I was. Ladies, wearing complexions more or less of a greenish tint, passed and repassed, one or two looking at me as if to say, 'Man, what are you doing here? Are you trying to pose as a Peri, at the gate of Paradise?'

I began to feel that my chance of seeing my poor girl was hopeless, but in about two minutes the

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stewardess came back and told me with a smile that none of the ladies down below minded a bit, and I was to come along.

I went along between the row of closed doors until I reached Nell's little cabin. 'My poor girl,' I exclaimed, 'you *have* been ill!'

'Nearly dead, Jack,' she answered, 'but we're there, and—and take Phyl out of this close air. See she gets some breakfast.'

'Can I send you anything?' I asked.

'No, dear, I've had some tea, and stewardess is going to get me some more; she has been so good to me, that stewardess; I believe I should have died if it hadn't been for her. Jack, did we take return tickets?'

'We did, my dear,' said I promptly, 'but we're not going to use them any further than Brussels; we'll go home by Ostend, as usual.'

'So extravagant,' she murmured.

'Not so extravagant as a funeral would be,' I remarked; 'you might die outright next time.'

Well, Phyl and I went up and walked about the deck a little, and very proud I was of the child, in her smart sailor clothes and cloth sailor cap, with her golden hair streaming over her reefer coat. She picked up her colour wonderfully too, and looked like a fairy as she hung on to my arm. Then we went down to breakfast, where Phyl had the place of honour next to

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'PHYL AND I WENT ON DECK

the captain. I found on my other hand a handsome elderly woman with delightful manners, who began to talk to me at once about Nell.

'Your wife's been very ill?' she said.

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'Dreadfully ill,' I replied. 'Poor thing! she always is.'

'Ah! so used I to be, but I never feel a qualm now,' she said cheerily. 'Have you got a notebook with you? Yes? Then just put this down: Twenty to twenty-five grains of chloral hydrate (according to the habit of the patient in taking such things). Have it made up by a chemist, and drink the dose as soon as you get on board, then lie down and keep as quiet as possible. Try it on your way home and I guarantee that your wife is not ill at all.'

'My dear lady,' I said fervently, 'if your prescription succeeds, and I feel sure that it will, I, for one, shall bless your name for ever. I do not know it, though,' I added, in a tone which begged the information.

'My name? it is Graham—Mrs. Graham,' she said, without any hesitation or stand-offishness.

The name conveyed nothing to me and yet I seemed to know her face. 'I am sure I have met you somewhere,' I said rather diffidently.

'Perhaps,' she said, 'if you were to tell me your name it might help me. Do you live in London?'

'Yes, at least very near London. I am about a good deal. My name is Winter.'

'Winter?' she said in considering tones, 'Winter? No, I don't seem to know it.'

But there, it is immaterial to this story what I

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said to her and she said to me; it is enough to say that we raked up a great many mutual friends, and that she, like us, was bound for Homburg.

We travelled together as far as Brussels, and put up by mutual consent at the same hotel, and during that evening we all found each other so much to our liking that we decided to make the rest of the journey together.

'Jack,' said Phyl to me as we bade farewell to the Hôtel Belle Vue at Brussels, 'why is Mrs. Graham going to Homburg?'

'For the gout, I think,' I answered.

'Ah!' said she wisely, 'that's French for a good appetite, isn't it?'

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CHAPTER XVIII

BORN TO RULE

WELL, here we are again at Homburg, comfortably settled in the châlet in our friend Mr. Schmidt's garden. Mr. Schmidt is the landlord of the Hôtel de l'Europe—I dare say that we might have chosen a 'smarter' place to stay at; the good people who review books for the smaller newspapers and journals will put me up to that—you, too, my reader, eh? Well, all I can say is that we generally stay there, the hotel being conveniently near to the Kursaal, and the good host being especially to our liking. And as to the smartness or non-smartness thereof, I can only say that last night I was smoking a cigarette in the wide archway which leads from the courtyard to the street, when Princess Christian and two of her ladies came quietly down the street and passed me on their way in to dinner.

By the bye, I saw such a pretty incident. A little fair-haired English child, the only one in the hotel besides Phyl, escaping from the hand of her nurse, ran right up to the Royal lady and clasped her round

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the knees. I fully expected that my next vocation in life would be to raise the Princess from the ground;

CLASPED HER ROUND THE KNEES

but no, the little child held fast and the Princess kept her balance wonderfully well. So for a moment they stood, the fair-faced, fair-haired lady, and the fair-

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faced, fair-haired little child; then the Princess patted the child's cheek and smiling passed down the courtyard.

The night before last 'the Prince' gave a dinner in the garden, and, for the credit of the Hôtel de l'Europe and of the people staying therein, I can bear testimony, the best of all—that of my own eyesight—that His Royal Highness was as little stared at as if he had been a Mr. Smith, the various parties dining under the trees eating their dinner as if the merry group of people at the table in the corner were their own everyday acquaintances.

The Victoria Hotel down the street is 'smart,' I believe, and yesterday morning 'the Prince' went to breakfast with Mr. Mackenzie.[1] The hotel was full of would-be very smart people, who, perhaps willing to show off the beauty of their manners to the first gentleman in Europe, all, or nearly all, left their tables and seats, and, to the indignation of 'the Prince's' host and the fury of the landlord, formed a semicircle round the Royal table, and stood in respectful but microscopic attention, gloating over his familiar lineaments, their eager eyes hanging upon every morsel which passed from his plate to his mouth.

But there is one thing which the British people may always look for from their Prince if occasion requires,

[1] The late Sir James Mackenzie.

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that is the snub unmistakable and complete. A friend of mine who is staying at the Victoria was eating his breakfast quietly and unostentatiously in company with a friend in his usual corner of the garden, very happy and quite hidden from a sight of 'the Prince' by the broad backs of his audience; he told me that at last 'the Prince' got up and went indoors, when the semicircle of open-mouthed spectators broke up into separate groups and began eagerly discussing the Royal visitor, his air, garments, looks, manners, and so on. Suddenly there was a hush; Mr. Mackenzie and 'the Prince' with one or two gentlemen appeared on the small balcony which runs in front of three or four of the ground-floor windows of the hotel, evidently with the intention of enjoying coffee and cigarettes. It was enough! In an instant the open-mouthed ones had formed into their semicircle again with the intention of having another good satisfying stare. Not for long, however; in what is commonly called 'a brace of shakes' 'the Prince' got up, stood still for a second, then turned his chair round, and sat down with his back towards the garden and the open-mouthed ones. And the story goes round Homburg to-day that 'the Prince' would have made the snub more complete and even more severe save for the unfortunate landlord of the hotel abjectly wringing his hands in the background of the picture.

Well, we are all very well satisfied with the Hôtel

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de l'Europe, and we are very glad to be out of the actual hotel itself. Our tiny flat is over the large detached servants' hall, and consists of a pleasant little sitting-room, with two nice bedrooms opening out of it. One for us, the other for Phyl and Elizabeth—oh! did I not tell you that we have brought the housemaid with us? How remiss of me! Yes, Elizabeth, greatly to her surprise, finds herself for the first time in foreign parts, and during the three days that she has been here has, I believe, written letters to every friend and relation she has in the world, each on the hotel paper, with a little view of the house on top and the magic words, 'Hôtel de l'Europe, Bad-Homburg,' underneath.

Mrs. Graham is staying in the Hôtel de l'Europe also. I like her immensely, but my raptures are getting modified. She is so—so hectoring! I read in a society paper the other day that a certain daughter of a noble house was born to rule. Mrs. Graham seems to have been born so too. But I was born to rule also—at least, I always seem to discover the fact afresh when anyone about me tries too hard to 'boss the show.'

'You drink the waters—the Elisabeth spring, of course?' she remarked to Nell, the evening we got here.

'No,' answered Nell, who was tired, I knew.

'No? Which then?' sharply.

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'I never drink any,' answered Nell with a laugh.

Mrs. Graham looked aghast. 'My dear girl,' she cried, 'what *is* the good of coming to Homburg unless you drink the waters? It's waste—sheer waste.'

'I come with Jack; he drinks them religiously,' Nell explained.

'But he doesn't drink them for you,' Mrs. Graham cried.

'Oh, no, of course not,' sweetly.

'And you are rheumatic, too?'

'Yes, rather.'

'Then you must drink the waters, my dear. I shall make it my business to see that you come down every morning with me.'

'But they give me the indigestion,' pleaded Nell.

'That is because you don't take them properly,' said Mrs. Graham, with a conviction which to me was simply appalling. 'I'll be at your door at a quarter-past six to-morrow morning, my dear, and *I* will show you how to drink the waters without giving you the indigestion. By the bye, does the child drink the waters?'

'No.'

'Then why did you bring her?'

'She is to have pine baths,' said Nell meekly.

I was puzzled; I could not make my wife out at all.

'Oh! nonsense, she ought to drink the waters,

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too,' said Mrs. Graham with decision. 'I am quite convinced that a child cannot begin too young—it is so good to get the properties of the waters well into the system.'

I began to think I had never heard such nonsense talked by anybody, and Nell up and spoke firmly enough. 'You see we have brought the child here by the doctor's advice,' she began, 'and, of course, it is not as if Phyl were our very own; then we might be willing to experiment on her, but as it is we are bound to keep very strictly to the doctor's orders, are not we?'

'Oh! half the doctors are old women,' Mrs. Graham burst out.

I thought that the faculty might with truth say the same of her; Nell, however, was firm, though very sweet.

And the next morning, sure enough, Mrs. Graham came rattling and hammering at our bedroom door just as the two watches on the dressing-table were on the stroke of a quarter-past six.

'Now, come, are you ready?' she called.

I was ready, and I opened the door in a moment or so to prove the fact.

'Wife ready?' she asked, looking past me into the bedroom.

'Come in,' said Nell cheerily.

Mrs. Graham marched in. '*Why*—why,' she

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gasped, 'is *this* what you call being ready at a quarter-past six to drink the waters?'

'I never did call it so,' Nell replied. '*You* did, my dear lady; but *I* never had the smallest intention of getting up before my usual time.'

'But you never said you wouldn't,' Mrs. Graham cried.

'No,' said Nell, smiling, 'and I never said I would. Do you go yourself, dear lady, and take Jack. See that he drinks his proper quantity and that you don't take a chill. I shall be down by breakfast-time, Jack,' she added in a louder tone to me.

I was all this time in the little sitting-room, and I chuckled quietly to myself when I saw how crest-fallen Mrs. Graham was.

'Your wife is not very easy to manage,' she remarked, as we crossed the road between the hotel and the entrance to the Kursaal.

'Not when she has made up her mind,' I returned without hesitation. I thought it was kinder to my wife to make this charming woman understand clearly at once that it was a perfectly hopeless task trying to turn Nell from a resolution which had once really formed itself in her mind. 'My wife is a woman singularly little influenced by outside opinion.'

Mrs. Graham murmured something about her desire to find sermons in stones, songs in the running brooks, and good in everything, and then adroitly

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turned the subject. I fancied that she had misquoted the words, but it was a sharp chilly morning, and barely half-past six o'clock, and I, being on my way to fill my poor stomach with cold and nauseous water, did not feel in the mood to cavil at anything, so I let it pass. Mrs. Graham went on with her change of subject blandly, pointing out the crystal dew on the grass and the early sunshine creeping over the tops of the trees.

'I had no idea it would be such a lovely place,' she cried rapturously.

Oh! Mrs. Graham—Mrs. Graham! When I recalled the knowing way in which she had discussed the cure in all its branches, when I remembered how she had expatiated on the efficacy of the waters, the wonderful cures that the pine baths had brought about, and then realised the fact, which she had never until that moment let slip, by sign or word, that she knew no more, *of her own knowledge*, about the pleasant little German Bad than I did, or rather do, of the moon—well, well, some men might have let her know that they had noticed the slip, but not I! I have too profound an admiration for that especial form of 'swagger,' and too thorough an enjoyment of it when I come in contact with it to wish to put it to the blush.

Sometimes Nell says to me, 'But why didn't you *tell* them so-and-so?' when someone has been

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'bouncing' a bit to me on a subject with which I am perfectly familiar. For instance, the other day a very intimate woman friend of mine was speaking in rather extravagant terms of a young singer who was enjoying a very modest success in London. She was not content, this friend of mine, to eulogise the young lady herself, she wanted also to make me do likewise.

Now, I happen to be exceedingly fond of this dear woman, who is rich and charming and pretty, but whose taste for music can be only what she hears from other people. No woman who really loves music would have a bad piano in her drawing-room—this dear soul's piano is an *iniquity*, nothing more or less! Well, she pressed me hard as to whether I did not think Miss Alida Blank was one of *the* first singers of the day, and at last I remarked that I thought the young lady undoubtedly pretty, but not up to much in the way of singing.

My friend looked at me half blankly for a minute, then a sweet smile broke out on her pretty and charming face. 'My dear old John,' she said, with affectionate candour, 'what *do you* know about music?'

Of course I laughed—what man could help it? But I said nothing, and to this day that dear woman believes that I could not play 'The Heavens are Telling' out of that first music book, which, like

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Mavor's Spelling-book, seems to have been scattered broadcast through the length and breadth of the land, and that I should not know 'Yankee Doodle' from the 'Dead March in Saul.'

Nell was very indignant; but what would be the good of explaining that for some twelve years my one amusement and recreation in life was music, in fact from my very first love trouble until I met my dear Nell? And I should have lost my quiet chuckle over the little episode, and a bit of my friendship, perhaps, by making a friend feel unnecessarily small. All the same, that phrase has become quite a household word with us—'My dear John, what *do you* know about music?'

Mrs. Graham did not much relish her first taste of the Elisabeth spring, but she gulped it down bravely, and started off on her ten minutes' walk in a way which to me betokened a morning with an inward and silent sorrow. I drank mine slowly while she was impatiently awaiting me on the top of the steps and criticising with cold eyes the manners and demeanour of some persons whom she afterwards stigmatised as 'those people.' I had seen them all there before. One was a remarkable woman, well known in English society, who wore a blue and white striped cotton skirt, a white dimity dressing jacket, a jet shoulder cape, and a remarkable bonnet which

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carried a date with it of about 1863, of the kind which were then irreverently called 'skyscrapers.'

'You're laughing,' said Mrs. Graham; 'I believe you know who she is. Yes, you do! tell me at once.'

'That is the Honourable Mrs. Titchinghame,' I replied.

'*That!* Mrs.—Titchinghame,' she repeated with a gasp; 'but—but she is quite a remarkable woman, isn't she? I don't remember at this moment what for, but she looks as if she had come out of the Ark.'

'Scarcely so far back as that,' I said gravely, 'but I believe she was an intimate friend of Cromwell's, or perhaps it was Mr. Samuel Pepys, I really forget.'

Mrs. Graham contrived to stop and admire the view so that she might get another look at the quaint and remarkable figure of Mrs. Titchinghame. '*My!*' she gasped under her breath, and I have been wondering ever since whether my profession of biographical knowledge really took her in, or whether she thought I was serious and wanted to let me down gently.

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CHAPTER XIX

HOME AGAIN

Our life at Homburg was really remarkable for nothing but its extreme quietness. Every morning I drank the waters, came back to breakfast at the hotel, dawdled for half an hour under the trees and watched Phyl playing with 'Wildmann,' the dachshund which belonged to the house, chatted a little to my friend Mr. Schmidt, and then, with Nell beside me and Phyl dancing gaily along in front, we usually sallied out for a little walk with a bath at the end thereof. We called every morning regularly at a small baker's shop half-way up a little side street, where we bought a long brown loaf, or rather roll, for the benefit of the ducks and carp in the pond in the Kur-park.

I consider that the pond in the Kur-park is well worth going to Homburg on purpose to see! I have seen a good many other ponds in which carp disported themselves and on whose surface divers kinds of ducks lived out their little lives, but I never saw a pond—oh! well, *lake*, if it pleases you better—which

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gave me such exquisite pleasure as that one. The carp are so fat, they splash about so boisterously and so defiantly with their broad shining sides and their broad strong tails; they leap out of the water into the brilliant summer sunshine, and all their scales turn to gold and silver amid a shower of falling diamonds, and then 'flop' they go into the water again and twist and turn and shoot along, coming up again and again to your feet to eye you with their round eyes, and hiss and snap, till you think instinctively of crocodiles, and the neat satin-coated ducks scuttle out of their way in double-quick time.

And what fun it is when you first go down, when the corner of the lake by the path and the railing is deserted, and neither ducks nor carp are in sight. You stand there with your hunk of bread for a minute or so and then all at once half a dozen ducks espy you, and they all come gliding and paddling towards you in eager anticipation of a feast while 'those beastly carp' are out of the way. And then, just as the coveted morsel is almost within their grasp—if you can call a duck's bill a grasp—hey presto! there is a loud hiss, a snap, and bang, bang, slap, slap, come the carp, flinging themselves broadside against the unfortunate ducks, and even laying hold of their poor webbed feet with their great mouths of terrible teeth. It is all up with the ducks then, and they have to scuttle away and gobble out

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their disappointment and their indignation in the background, unless you are good-natured and fling a few hunks of bread beyond the reach of the carp, so that the ducks may win in the race for it.

It is remarkable, but I have never once stopped at that pond to watch the battles between fish and fowl, that some kindly and well-informed sojourner has not stopped too, and affably told me that, great fun as this show was, the carp of Frankfort or Worms or Nuremberg were bigger and fiercer and stronger and more fun generally—older too; indeed, more than once I have met travellers at Homburg who had seen carp five hundred years old. Dear me! but travellers tell strange tales, and the beauty of them is that they are all true. Perhaps you will doubt *me*, my reader, but it is true that during our visit to Homburg, a middle-aged, fair-haired lady of portly presence, used to go regularly every morning round to the most unfrequented side of the lake, and standing quite close to the water's edge and facing it used to warble away apparently to her own intense enjoyment for a couple of hours or so, singing one operatic song after another, with just as much care as if the surface of the lake was a great opera house. I may be, nay, I know that I am very ignorant on that particular subject, but for the life of me I cannot make out what her object was. Perhaps she had some peculiar affection of the throat and the imme-

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diate air of the lake was considered good for it; perhaps her trouble was higher up than the throat, I know not. I only know that nobody to whom I spoke about it was better informed than myself, and that everybody thought it was a very strange proceeding.

Well, after the walk we had our baths; and really Phyl's first remarks after her first pine bath were very funny.

'Well, old woman,' said I, when she and Nell appeared at luncheon, 'and how did you like your bath?'

'It was most singular,' said she in reply. 'First the old woman filled the bath—or stay, I'll begin at the beginning. First we went in and everybody spoke in whispers, as if they were in church. Auntie got the tickets, and we went upstairs, and waited and waited on a sort of landing where everybody looked very cross and watched hard all the time. Then at last we were fetched by an old woman who grunted and took our tickets from us. Then Elizabeth and I went into one room and Auntie into another, and we gave the bath woman some little bottles of treacly-looking stuff that smelt like—like a chemist's shop something, and something like the logs they burn at Christmas. She filled the bath with water, and when she had timed the heat she emptied the little bottle into the bath, and it turned all the water a deep, deep

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brown. I got in,' she said unctuously, 'and simply *revelled* in it.'

'Indeed,' I managed to edge in, 'I'm glad of it. Then you'll be able to stand one every morning, eh? And here is Wilhelm.'

Wilhelm was the chief waiter, and, in common with all the other waiters in the house, was already Phyl's devoted slave. He bent down to her now. 'What would little miss like for her luncheon?' he inquired. 'There is bouillon, and kalf—what you call veal—grilled chicken' (only *he* said 'kgkrilled'), 'and there is compôte of two kinds.'

'I'll have some grilled chicken and some compôte, cherries if you have them, thank you, Wilhelm,' said Phyl politely.

'And Missie will drink——?'

'Milk, please, Wilhelm,' the child answered.

Wilhelm made a gesture of assent and departed. *Our* luncheon apparently was a matter of no importance, and Nell and I looked at one another with intensest amusement. It was always so. If Phyl went down into the garden at any hour, in less than two minutes she had half a dozen waiters to learn her pleasure! It was the same at Mainz, and the same at Cologne. Nay, it was even the same on board the Rhine boat, where the waiters, one and all, are the roughest and surliest to be found in their class. But even these all melted before the radiance

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of Phyl's sweet little face and blue, blue eyes. Ah me! a sweet child is a wonderful thing, a very glimpse of heaven.

HOME AGAIN

We stayed a few days at Ostend on our way home, and Phyl insisted on bathing, and went valiantly out

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with the elderly old gentleman in a red bathing suit and his breast covered with medals, who had charge of the machines. He could not speak a word of English and Phyl could not speak a word or scarcely a word of French, and they failed to make each other understand when Phyl had had enough of it. Phyl says now that she likes paddling on the sands at Dovercourt, but that she never wants to go to Ostend again. Poor Phyl!

Finally we reached England in safety, and as regards Nell in comparative peace. She was not sea-sick, but she thinks she will be more assured that it is possible to take a sea trip without serious inconvenience the next time that she uses Mrs. Graham's valuable prescription.

Mrs. Graham, by the bye, left us at Homburg and went on to the Engadine. I may be wrong—I but give my opinion for what it is worth—but it seems to me that a trip to the Engadine, like a trip to Scotland, is really in many cases only another form of pulling your blinds down and living at the back of the house during certain seasons of the year. However, we are the best and dearest of friends now—friends for life, I think was the exact phrase—and have exchanged addresses and mean to see a great deal of one another in Town this next winter. We may, but I have my own private doubts about it.

Phyl's remark after Mrs. Graham had really gone

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was very quaint: 'I wonder,' she said wonderingly, 'if there was ever a Mr. Graham?'

'Of course there was; she is a widow,' answered Nell.

'I wonder what he died of?' Phyl went on, in the same far-away tones.

'Oh! let me see,' said Nell, 'she told me. Oh, yes, he died of apoplexy five or six years ago.'

'Ah!' said Phyl in a comprehensive way, 'I see. Well, I should think he would be 'plexed after living with Mrs. Graham always; shouldn't you, Jack?'

But I had no words with which to answer her; I could but yell—and I did.

They were all very glad to see us again when we finally got back to Wix. The twins were both looking as blooming and bonny as if they had lived in the fresh country air always. Cis claimed me as soon as I got out of the carriage. 'Jack,' she said, in her very own sweet and confiding ways, 'Jack, *will* you come and look for eggs with me?'

I could not and did not resist her, and, hand in hand, we two went off to the hen-house on our search intent. It was rather late in the afternoon, but one old hen was comfortably tucked up on a nest, and, at our approach, she flew out with a great to-do and ran fluttering and clucking out into the yard.

'Two eggs!' cried Cis, and took them up with her little eager hands, then turned to me with a charming

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air of surprise. 'Why, Jack,' she exclaimed, 'that old hen's been *boiling these eggs*.'

By the bye, a big, gaunt, wicked-looking, black cat seems to be hanging about the house, looking wistfully in at the doors, and generally prowling around. Nell, who is very tender-hearted, told the servants to feed it. Parker was majestically indignant.

'We have fed the cat, Ma'am,' she explained, 'and really it's most unpleasant—it's pretty quiet as long as we don't feed it, but directly it gets fed it '*owls* for twenty minutes, enough to make your blood run cold to hear it.'

Parker only drops an aspirate now and again when she wishes to be very emphatic, the effect of which is distinctly funny. My wife was very emphatic also.

'Why, Parker,' she exclaimed in her hearty downright way, 'can't you see that the creature has been *starved?* Of course it howls; you would howl, too, if you had gone as long on short commons as that poor cat, for you would have agonies of indigestion, Parker, agonies simply.'

Parker sniffed, and murmured something which *looked* severe about 'cats and things,' but from that moment the cat's future meals were safe.

Still, I must say I did sympathise with Parker not a little in my heart of hearts. However, Nell was firm, and when Nell is firm upon any subject it is no

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IN THE HEN-HOUSE

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use indulging in any further argument in our household. The children, too, were firm—firm in insisting that the cat should be fed; but they shared with Parker, and I may say with me, the objection to the ' 'owls ' which invariably followed on feeding.

Yesterday morning, however, a particular bit of business which for some weeks has been looking as black as black suddenly turned out well—regularly turned up trumps. Nell looked at me across the table with reproachful eyes.

'What did I tell you?' she asked. 'It's the black cat.'

In the face of the contents of that particular letter I could say simply nothing; and the black cat, which was as usual prowling outside, watching the front door with eager and hungry eyes, was duly welcomed in and presented with an extra large saucer of milk.

I am bound to say that Madam Puss appreciated the delicate attention to the very bottom of the saucer, and the three children vied with each other in making her feel thoroughly at home, if not actually at her ease. And I am also in common honesty bound to state that the period of penance which succeeded to that of enjoyment was unmistakably more appalling than any which had gone before. Good digestion in Madam Pussy's case most assuredly did *not* wait on appetite.

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'Jack, *what* is it that makes her howl so?' little Cis burst out at last. She looked at me with all her soul in her eyes, and clasped her dimpled hands together, as if the cat's heartrending wails were anguish and agony to her.

'My dear little woman,' I answered, 'the poor beast has been so long without food, or with very little food, that now when it has as much as it can eat, it has got the indigestion.'

'And what,' asked Cis, '*is* indigestion?'

'In plain English in this case,' I replied, 'it is stomach-ache.'

Cis slipped down on to the hearthrug, and bending down over her laid her soft pink cheek against the creature's ragged black coat. 'Dear puss'tats,' she murmured, 'I'm so sorry I said you were horrid.'

We were off to town, Nell and I, by the ten o'clock train, which was the reason that we read our letters at breakfast instead of in bed as was usual. We rushed off then and in less than three hours were driving along the Strand on our way to Earl's Court, where we were going to stay the night with a friend, and to spend the afternoon finding ourselves a house.

As a matter of fact we had really decided on the house so far as our own choice was concerned, but, as usual, there were a good many little matters to be settled in the way of fixtures. We arranged everything, rather to Nell's relief, as our time at the Cedars

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was up on August 13, and at present we are only remaining on sufferance by the kindness of the Company, so that we may enjoy our holiday to the full.

I think as one gets older one gets to dread the wrench of a parting more and more. We manage to live through it, but it is weary work saying good-bye. Still, in the great mother city, which most of us love in our inmost hearts as much as we pretend that we are weary of her, there is always to be found the precious ointment of compensation.

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CHAPTER XX

A DELIGHTFUL SURPRISE

Six weeks have gone by. I have had a wearisome time, but now I hope—and pray—that my labours have come to an end.

I do not mean the ordinary labour of life—that is bearable enough, and the skilled workman almost invariably takes much pleasure in his labour, whether it be of hand or brain, or in those wonderful arrangements of wheels within wheels which we call society.

I think most of us are alike; we eat, and drink, and work, and take our worries and our pleasures as part of the day's work, and then, all at once, there comes a spell of extraordinary worry or wearisomeness, every phase of which we are convinced must be the very last, for our patience and our forbearance simply neither could nor would last out any further. And yet so often there are yet lower depths, and our patience and forbearance, if we are tolerably brave, lasts out, spins out, is drawn out to the very end.

My weariness has been shopping! I hate it. I

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gave Nell free leave to do as she liked with regard to the house in Nevern Square; she knew as well as I did what we could comfortably afford to spend, she knew better than I did what she wanted, in fact, she knew all about it and I knew nothing, and yet nothing would satisfy that dear woman but that I should go with her to choose every single thing that she wanted —and we were having practically an entire re-furnishing.

However, I have one bit of satisfaction to set off against my soul's loathing, I am proud to be able to say, although, perhaps, I say it that shouldn't, that I kept my temper like—well, not like a man at all, but like some sweet woman. I will say this for my girl, she thoroughly deserved to have her way in the matter. She has put up for more than ten years with an exceedingly shabby house—for she married me for the dinner of herbs where love is, having taken me for better or worse, when there did not seem to be a possibility of getting much worse, and very little prospect of ever getting any better. And long after the worst pinch was over, when she was able to have pretty frocks, and I was able to suggest a course at Homburg as a reasonable remedy for rheumatism, still she put up with the shabby old house, aye, and made it pretty and artistic-looking with her own hands, too, long after we might safely have launched out into more luxurious ways, if I had not been born

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with a crank in my head on which 'plunging' in any form acts as a red rag to a bull.

'Mrs. Winter,' a man said to my wife one day, several years ago now, 'I've been looking round your dining-room; it's a very fine room, and exceedingly well arranged, but I *cannot* tell what scheme you have gone on for decorating your walls.'

'I'll tell you,' said Nell, smiling. 'When we came to this house we were very poor—too poor to re-paint this room. The Company would not do it either, though they have really been awfully good to us. Well, this room simply *appalled* me. The caretakers had driven their great nails in in every direction, leaving pieces of plaster hanging loose, and big holes, as big as my fist, here and there. First, I had the walls scrubbed down several times with carbolic soap, then I covered the worst places with my biggest pictures—for we had very nice things of that kind, as it happened, luckily for us—and then all the rest I hid either with a fan or an old china plate or a little picture. Then when I had done all that, I went round the walls again and I sort of balanced everything, perhaps by another fan or a couple more plates. For instance, at first I had that picture of the "Return from Inkerman," to balance "Scotland for Ever," with that bit of old oak and that oil-painting between them. Then I found that the damp had got into that wall, and was already beginning to mark the back of the frame. I took it down and

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covered the worst damp with four old blue Spode plates, added two others to make a bold line on the wall, filled over two bad damp spots with the big fans, and added all the other things to make the whole wall look a little less insane than when only the mouldy part was hidden. And I don't think,' she said, with proud naïveté, 'that it looks half bad.'

'My dear lady,' said the man—and he was a man standing well in the artistic world, too—'I should like to shake hands with you. I've always thought Winter one of the luckiest chaps I know, but now I know he deserves it, with a wife like you to share it.'

Nell looked quite quizzical. 'That's queer sort of logic, isn't it?' she remarked.

'Not a bit,' said the man stoutly; 'the best logic in the world.'

And I must do Nell the justice to say that she is eminently reasonable in another way. She does not insist upon spending four-and-sixpence in cab or 'bus fares, that she may buy a bunch of skewers for three farthings less than she can buy them at the nearest shop. If she did I really don't think I could live with her. I should, what Phyl calls, 'contempt' her so.

By the bye, I must break off from my account of my time of penance to tell you something that Phyl said yesterday.

The day before yesterday the three children were with Nell in a little sitting-room beyond my study,

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TEA IN THE 'NEST'

which is just behind the dining-room. Nell was having tea with them in this sanctum of their own, which they call 'the Nest,' and they were all

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very busy discussing the contents of the Christmas box which is going out to Bob and Nannie Dare.

'I *know* dear Nannie would like a feather boa,' said Nell.

Nell has a rage for feather boas just now, and as I loathe those articles of dress with all my soul, she does not care to buy one for herself, so wants to send Nannie one.

'No,' said Phyl, firmly; 'I'm assolved to send darling Mother a fan—she loves fans.'

'Resolved,' corrected Nell, gently, and gave way upon the point, thinking that the feather boa should be her present to her sister.

'Resolved,' repeated Phyl, as if trying to impress the word on her memory. 'Auntie, dear, may I have another lump of sugar?'

Now Nell generally lets the youngsters have as much sugar in reason as they wish for, partly because in her own young days a second piece of sugar was an extravagance little short of a crime. 'Have you stirred your tea, darling?'

'Oh! yes, Auntie,' answered Phyl, suiting the action to the word; 'it's all resolved.'

'Dissolved, dear,' said Nell, handing the sugar-bowl over.

'Oh! dissolved,' repeated Phyl.

Well, the hour passed, and no more was said on the subject till the following morning — yesterday

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morning, that is—when Cis suddenly asked Phyl if her egg was nice.

'Yes,' said Phyl.

'Is it hard?' asked Cis.

'No,' replied Phyl; 'it's a solving egg.'

'What sort of an egg?' I inquired.

'A solving egg, dear,' she replied; 'it solves in my mouth.'

I consider that this is quite a remarkable trait in Phyl's character. She will make the most ludicrous shots (and in the right sense, too) at a word not usually heard in a young child's mouth, and, if you correct her, she accepts the correction with perfect sweetness. But should she not quite get hold of the right word, or forget the correct pronunciation, nothing will ever induce her to use the original word again—never if it has once been questioned. She will fence round and use half the correct word, aye! and does it frequently, but the original incorrect word—*never!* I believe that Phyl, with reasonable training, will be a remarkable woman some day.

Well, to go back to my wearisome six weeks, I was just going to say, when I remembered about Phyl, that Nell has one great virtue in a woman as rare as it is delightful. She fixes on a shop, and to that shop she sticks through thick and thin, as long as they treat her with ordinary consideration. In this instance she chose everything out of one shop, and

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though I hated even going there, though I detest all and every form of shopping more than any words in the English language would adequately express, I blessed her for it all the time; and as blessings are the most powerful levers in all the universe, I think that was how I managed to keep a cheerful and smiling countenance all through, so that when we came out of Hampton's for the last time, Nell slipped her arm within mine and squeezed it softly. 'Dear old Jack,' she asked in a way which made me think of all the three children at once, 'you haven't minded it *much*, have you?'

Well, as a matter of fact I had. I had hated it, loathed it; but I turned and looked at her, and I lied deliberately and elaborately. I told her that I had not only thoroughly enjoyed myself during our many visits to Pall Mall, but that I was *almost* sorry we had got it all done.

I don't feel very uneasy in my mind—and Nell was so happy that evening. I thought instinctively of the man in the story, who was engaged to the dearest girl in the world, and how in the dull winter evenings they used to go out and flatten their noses against the shop-windows, and choose what they would have when their ship came home. I rather fancy a woman wrote that story—no man could have drawn such an angel as that young man must have been. If I remember rightly, *he* died young—they

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always do. *I* shall live to be ninety, I have no doubt.

Well, yesterday morning I settled down quietly to my work for the first time—yes, the very first time—in the new house. I was, in fact, planning out a two-volume novel; not an easy business always, you may take my word for it, my dear sir or madam. However, I had a clear scheme in my head, which I was just getting into shape, when I heard a rap-rap at the door. 'POST!' I exclaimed aloud, although there was nobody to hear me. Yes, that is pretty much always how we receive the coming of the welcome double-knock; for welcome it is, although in nine cases out of ten it generally means one or more troublesome letters to write, as well as to receive.

As usual, I jumped up from my seat, and ran to the door. Yes, there was something in the box—three letters—two for me, bills, both of them, and one for Nell, from India.

I laid the letter on the hall table—for Nell and the chicks were all out, and retired into my den with my unsatisfactory missives, and, laying them aside, was soon deep in the life story of a gallant young cavalry officer, who was destined not only to carve a name in the annals of glory for himself, but also to carve a very respectable slice of fortune for me.

Presently I heard Nell and the children come. 'Oh! a letter from India,' said Nell, in a pleased

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voice. Then they all went into the dining-room and shut the door, and two minutes afterwards I heard such a piercing scream that I flung down my pen,

THE LETTER FROM INDIA

and bolted into the hall, just as Nell flung the door of the dining-room open with my name upon her lips,

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'My darling,' I cried, 'what is it?'

'Oh, Jack,' she panted, seizing hold of me and dragging me into the room; 'such news! such news!—I can scarcely tell you for crying,' and she dashed her tears away, and caught me round the neck and kissed me, then clasped Phyl in her arms, and kissed her again and again with all sorts of little ejaculations and sobs of pleasure. I saw that nothing was seriously wrong, that, in fact, nothing was wrong at all. 'What is it?' I asked, smiling, I knew not at what except at her unfeigned pleasure. 'Has old Bob got promotion?'

'Better than that,' my girl cried, 'they—but stay—I'll read it to you. Listen to this:

'"My own darling sister,—The greatest, the most wonderful, the most glorious thing has happened. Old Miss Brown is dead——"'

'Well, 'pon my word,' I broke in, but Nell only waved her hand at me and read on:

'"You know she was Bob's godmother, but we never, never expected to get a farthing from her. She always said he was a fool to marry me for love when he might have had Mary Pettigrew for the asking, with a hundred thousand pounds. Bob gave up all hope of even a small legacy from Miss Brown when he first told her we were going to be married. But the dear old thing's bark has been worse than her bite after all, and she has left Bob thirty thou-

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sand pounds." Thirty—thousand—pounds!' Nell repeated, impressively.

'By Jove,' I exclaimed, 'what a fine old girl she must have been! I wish she'd been *my* godmother.'

'"Now,"' Nell read on, '"you will understand, my darling sister, what *my* first thought was—to see my dear chicks that I've been *longing, aching, pining* for all these weary months, only comforted by the thought of your ineffable goodness to them, and dear old Jack's, too. Well, Bob does not want to leave the regiment until he gets promotion; so will you, darling, you and Jack, do me a last kindness, and bring them out here for a few months? It will be good for Jack, and I know it would be a delightful trip for you, and quite safe for the children; and you could let your house easily for the winter; and, oh, darling, do—do—do—write, and say you'll come out by the *first* boat. It will be *quite* safe for the children. I've asked the doctors, and they *all* say there never was such a station as this for children. And Nanna—you'll bring Nanna—and, darling, couldn't you wire just *one word*—yes or no—to say you'll come? I shall not sleep or rest till I have your answer. I wanted to wire, but Bob said it would only put you *in a fever*."'

Nell stopped there, and looked at me. The children were simply dumb with the prospect, and said nothing at all.

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'Well?' she said.

'Well?' I echoed. 'What do you think?'

'I do not like letting my new house,' she said, promptly.

'Neither do I,' I returned. 'But about Nannie's scheme?'

'I don't mind,' she said; 'but——'

'But what?'

'Oh! Jack,' she cried, her soft eyes filling with tears, 'can't you understand her, poor girl? What's the good of having thirty thousand pounds left you, if you have not the one thing you want? You will go, won't you, darling?'

I laughed outright. It is such women as Nell and Nannie Dare who rule the world. Why, I would go to the end of the earth, or to perdition, if she asked me; and India is not exactly either the one or the other.

THE END

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In conclusion, let me say that, in giving this book for the benefit of the Victoria Hospital, I have intentionally chosen a story which was not specially written

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for the purpose, as I have a horror of tales written with what is called an object; they always remind me strongly of a powder in a spoonful of jam. That portion of the great generous English-reading people which I am proud to call my own public, know well how very near to my heart lies the welfare of the helpless little ones, so poorly fitted to take any part in the fierce battle of life. To all of these I would say, 'If you have aught to spare, give it for God's sake to such an institution as the Victoria Hospital; and if you have nothing to give to others, you can recommend this book to your friends, and so indirectly help in the best work that human love can accomplish.'

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